Cinderella Didn't Live Happily Ever After

The Hidden Messages in Fairy Tales

Anne E. Beall, PhD

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Cover Designed by Anne E. Beall

ISBN: 9798482613726

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For Kristen and Owen Hensley, who have helped me immeasurably.

Contents

Cinderella Didn't Live Happily Ever After 1
Contents 1
Tables 2
Acknowledgements 4
Preface 5
1 |The Importance of Fairy Tales 7
2 |Poor Cinderella 9
3 |Love and Marriage: Who Marries Up and Why? 15
4 |Engagements and Married Life 25
5 |Agency in Fairy Tales: Who is Active and Why 30
6 |Who is Powerful and Who Suffers? 36
7 |Good Overcomes Evil—But When and For Whom? 45
8 |Common Characters and What They Reveal 53
9 |Other Messages in Fairy Tales 69
10 |Final Thoughts 74
11 |Methodology and Data from Grimms' Fairy Tales 78
Anne E. Beall, Ph.D. 89
References 90
Index 95

Tables

Table 1: **Marrying Up** 80
Table 2: **Reasons for Male Characters Marrying Up** 81
Table 3: **Reasons for Female Characters Marrying Up** 81
Table 4: **Gender and Marrying Because of Appearance** 81
Table 5: **Active, Agentic Characters** 82
Table 6: **Most Powerful Character in Each Story** 82
Table 7: **Royalty and Power** 82
Table 8: **Suffering** 83
Table 9: **Gender of Character Confined in Story** 84
Table 10: **Gender of Bewitched Character** 84
Table 11: **Vanquishing Evil** 84
Table 12: **Goodness, Evil and Gender** 85
Table 13: **Male Characters, Goodness and Power** 85
Table 14: **Female Characters, Goodness and Power** 85
Table 15: **Characters and Emotions** 86
Table 16: **Overview of Male Characters** 87
Table 17: **Overview of Female Characters** 88

"Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed."

—G.K. CHESTERTON

"If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank many people who encouraged me to write this book and who believed it had a powerful message to convey. Several of the writers in my writing group (Friends with Words) encouraged me to finish this work and to get it out to as many people as possible.

I'd also like to thank my colleagues at Beall Research who listened to a presentation about the data and had many helpful comments. I'd specifically like to thank Helen Argiroff-Flood, who coded 129 of the Grimms' fairy tales.

Kristen Hensley, my dearest friend, often encouraged me to finish the book when the analyses and writing became arduous. She believed this work was important to share. I'll always appreciate her.

I also want to thank Jin A. Lee for her fabulous illustrations and ability to convey many different feelings with the stroke of a pen. I communicated very little in my requests and she was able to express so much in her drawings. She's truly talented.

Last, I'd like to thank the many people whom I told about this book in casual conversations who said they couldn't wait to read it. You propelled me onward in this work with all your enthusiasm.

--Anne Beall, Chicago

Preface

On a recent visit to California to see friends, I was introduced to a large, masculine man—the kind of guy who would look great with an axe in his hand, chopping down a large tree. We had only talked for a few minutes when he revealed he would be getting married soon and was looking forward to his fairy tale wedding. I was surprised by the word *fairy tale*; I hadn't expected *that* word from such a manly man. I asked him what he envisioned, and he described a luxurious event where he, his bride, and his guests were treated like royalty. He also described how our mutual friend treats his wife like a *princess*.

While writing this book, I was struck by how often I heard the words "fairy tale," "prince charming," "princess," "queen," and "king" in everyday conversation. Once you start listening for these words, you realize the prevalence of them. We use these words often; their underlying concepts describe our lives and our dreams. And these ideas have a power of their own because they help us frame our lives. One of my friends has a saying in her home that she gave to her husband, which says: "You're my happily ever after." I believe all of us wish for some version of the fairy tale life where we find our version of the "handsome prince" or "beautiful princess."

Fairy tales hold a special place in our lives—we become familiar with them when we're young and they hold a magical power from that day forward. Perhaps we believe the stories we were told as children are true somewhere in the world and that impossible things can occur. Maybe royal people do live magical lives and occasionally marry common people. I believe that's why the royal weddings are such watched events and why

royalty, who often have little power in countries, still exist. They represent an ideal.

Fairy tales also impart messages to us that things will work out for the best and we can overcome tremendous odds—just like the characters who seem to have everything going against them but still triumph over those more powerful. These stories provide us with examples of children overcoming witches, average men defeating giants, and poor, downtrodden women marrying handsome princes. They give us hope.

These basic messages only skim the surface. Fairy tales have a lot to say about gender, power, roles, marriage, love, and life. It's those messages I will review in this book. My colleague, Helen Argiroff-Flood, and I identified these messages through a content analysis of the Grimms' stories. We learned fairy tales have many hidden messages. Some of the messages were expected, but many were surprising and troublesome. And although the tales seem like a minor form of entertainment, I'll argue they provide us with a fantasy about how life could be for us. They give us hope that one can live happily ever after, and we can become a king or a queen.

1 | The Importance of Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are among some of the first stories children learn in many cultures, and many people recall being read fairy tales when they were young. These magnificent tales are also prevalent in movie versions that both adults and children enjoy watching. These movies are highly successful, with the 2015 version of Cinderella grossing over $200 million and 2017 Beauty and the Beast grossing over $500 million domestically.[i] But there are other movie versions of these classics such as Ella Enchanted and Pretty Woman, which essentially tell the same story of Cinderella. Ella has a wicked stepmother and terrible stepsisters who will stop at nothing to humiliate her. Despite this situation, in the end, she prevails and gets her handsome prince. The movie Pretty Woman doesn't have an evil stepmother, but it's the story of a poor woman who ends up marrying a handsome and wealthy businessman. In works of fiction, such as Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen, Cinderella can also be seen in the form of a downtrodden but good woman who ends up marrying a very wealthy man. This story is popular in both the book and movie versions.

The fairy tale has an ancient history. Researchers have determined some stories have prehistoric roots. Beauty and the Beast is believed to be 4,000 years old and Jack and the Beanstalk is about 5,000 years old.[ii] Cinderella appears in China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) in the story of *Yeh Shen*.[iii] Given its long history, it may have as many as 1,500 versions.[iv] The preponderance of fairy tales within the German culture prompted the Brothers Grimm to begin collecting oral fairy tales from friends and family, as well as peasant story tellers, which they published in 1812. The stories

are so popular that their collection of fairy tales is the second most read and translated book after the bible.[v]

Many might say fairy tales are just entertainment and modern people don't take them seriously. I'd argue that at some level we take them *very seriously*, and they impact us in ways we don't even know. One researcher found that children who had been read a fairy tale were more subdued and pensive afterward.[vi] Perhaps the tale touched on the children's inner concerns, and they were thinking about what they just heard.

Some people believe fairy tales are particularly important to children because they allow them to project any current anger toward the adults in their lives onto truly evil beings, and to ultimately see the downtrodden triumph over evil, which gives children hope. These stories give the child a canvas on which they can work through the major issues of their emotional lives.[vii]

Given the prevalence and popularity of fairy tales, it's worth examining them to see what they have to say. It's my contention that fairy tales are instructive about how men and women should behave, how we should deal with obstacles, what behaviors are appropriate, and what behaviors will be rewarded.

According to Reader's Digest, the nine fairy tales that are most popular are: Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, Sleeping Beauty, Jack and the Beanstalk, Puss in Boots, and Rapunzel.[viii] There are movie versions and countless children's books with these specific stories.

I'll discuss some of the major aspects of these tales that are noteworthy. However, an analysis of only nine stories is a limited sample on which to make conclusions about fairy tales. Many of these stories come from the Brothers Grimm collection, so I'll discuss that entire collection of 200 stories. The only popular fairy tale not contained in this collection is Puss in Boots, which has an animal as its main character. And given that animal behavior may not translate to lessons for humans, I've limited the analysis of stories to ones where humans are the main characters. Let's begin with Cinderella, which is one of the most beloved fairy tales of all time.

2 | Poor Cinderella

Cinderella is my favorite fairy tale because I like the idea of a poor, hard-working, mistreated girl who eventually finds happiness through marriage to a wealthy prince. Isn't that what most women long for—a man who is financially successful to provide them with a palace and luxurious lifestyle? Researchers have found that when it comes to selecting a mate, women tend to look for men with financial resources, and men tend to look for women who are beautiful.[i] Men tend to value attractiveness more than women, whereas women tend to value intelligence more than men.[ii] Did we get this notion women are supposed to be beautiful whereas men are supposed to be intelligent and successful from the fairy tale? Or does the fairy tale just tap into notions we have about love and romance between men and women?

The Grimms' version of Cinderella describes a young woman who loses her mother and gains a stepmother and two stepsisters when her father remarries. The stepmother and stepsisters mistreat her terribly, but she still manages to go to the King's ball and meet the prince who is looking for a wife. In this version, there is no fairy godmother and no midnight imperative to get home. However, she loses a shoe and eventually claims her prince by showing she fits the errant footwear. In the more popular version by Charles Perrault, a fairy godmother is introduced into the story and a coach with attendants is created through magic.[iii] Interestingly, in this version, Cinderella forgives her stepsisters for treating her badly and marries them off to lords. In the Grimms' version, birds peck the stepsisters' eyes out at the wedding, and they're permanently blinded. Perhaps that's why some say the Grimms' version of popular fairy tales is a bit "grim."

Some Issues with Cinderella

As much as I love the Cinderella fantasy, I'm pretty sure she didn't live happily ever after. My first concern is her lack of qualifications for the job she's taking. In both stories, it's clear Cinderella isn't a royal person and doesn't appear to know how that particular world operates. Both stories suggest she lives in a cottage or middle-class home, making it unlikely she understands the complexities of running a kingdom and being an integral part of it. I'm thinking about the real Princess Diana who was from an aristocratic family in England, but who had no idea what she was getting into, by her own account, when she married Prince Charles. She was often overwhelmed.[iv]

The big trade here is that Cinderella brings her beauty, and the prince brings status and wealth. The prince is drawn to her because she's beautiful and wears amazing gowns. Yes, gowns. In the older versions of this story, she goes to more than one ball and dazzles him with her fine clothing, which is provided by either a godmother or a magic bird. It's never mentioned that she's clever or interesting. Nor is there any mention of a conversation between the couple—just dancing. The ball has been specifically set up for him to select a wife, and it appears that selection will occur primarily based on appearance given the short time frame. Sadly, beauty fades over time. It would seem Cinderella is bringing less to the party than the prince and therefore her power in that relationship will be low.

My other big issue with Cinderella is that she seems to have some personality disorder that causes her to act like a doormat. She does everything her stepmothers and stepsisters order her to do, even though their behavior is highly abusive. She never protests that she should be treated better by them or ever refuses to do their bidding. And she never tries to change her current situation or find a new one. At the end of the day, she's so passive that her situation only changes when the prince goes in search of her and rescues her from her abusive home life. Some may think women just weren't independent of men in these tales' settings, but the reality is that women throughout the ages have lived on their own due to the loss of husbands or fathers.

Cinderella's Tale Has Clear Messages

The underlying message for women is they should make a bid for a higher-status man. That's a problematic message for women who are at the very top of the educational and success pyramid. There are already too few men of equal status, let alone higher. And high-status men don't tend to marry their equals. They often marry women who are less successful than themselves. This is probably why successful women are less likely to marry and less likely to have children in the United States than their male counterparts.[v]

When there are huge discrepancies between the status and resources of two people in a marriage, the one who has greater resources will generally have more power.[vi] Go to the table with less and you'll pay somehow for the privilege to play. This differential power is because those with more resources and status have more potential partners available to them and may have less overall emotional investment in the relationship, which gives them more power.[vii] When a person knows he can have many other partners, he is less likely to stay in an unfulfilling relationship—a behavior we see in several fairy tales where kings decide the queen should be banished.

Cinderella primarily brings beauty to the table (and maybe a good heart). The prince, however, brings much more. We assume he has good looks, title, status, wealth, and a kingdom. He's likely to have many more potential partners interested in him than just Cinderella. When her beauty fades, will he still be so interested in her if that's primarily what she's offering? When we retell this story, are we suggesting women should find men with a higher status, resulting in them having less power in that relationship?

The underlying message of Cinderella is that it's worthwhile for women to invest in their appearance and make a play for a man who is out of their league. If they're lovely enough, they can launch into a different social circle. That is certainly the case for some of the wealthy and famous men who have married models. The other message is that passivity is fine and facing abuse without any response will eventually be rewarded. Someone

will rescue us from our difficult situation because good always triumphs over evil. Just hang in long enough and magical things will happen.

As a thought experiment, I'd like you to imagine the Cinderella story where we reverse the genders and Cinder is a male character whose father dies, and his mother remarries. His new stepfather and stepbrothers treat

him terribly, but he continues to live with them and do their bidding. A princess is looking for a husband, and her father throws a ball so she can choose a spouse. Unfortunately, Cinder's stepfather and stepbrothers tell him he's not allowed to attend. He goes anyway, thanks to his "fairy godfather" who dresses him in a fine tuxedo. He dances with the princess and then leaves, losing one of his shoes in the process. The princess decides to find Cinder and searches throughout the kingdom until she finds a man who fits the shoe. Does that sound silly?

Fairy Tales Live within Us

These messages impact women in a variety of ways. One way is through the idea of having a fairy tale wedding. If you put *Cinderella wedding* into Google, you'll get over 51 million results—everything from Cinderella wedding dresses to actual videos of people enacting their version of the fairy tale in their wedding videos. Several observers have noted that in her wedding to Prince Henry, Meghan Markle wore the same dress Cinderella wore in the 1950's movie.[viii]

Cinderella also reinforces the idea that a woman's appearance will determine her status. That's a tough message for those who aren't born beautiful. Obviously, fairy tales are not the only purveyor of that message, but they don't help. This focus on appearance is one reason women around the globe spend billions each year on beauty products and services.

Although wedding gowns and extravagant wedding receptions can make a woman feel she's a princess for a day, I wonder if that should be the goal. Does every woman really want to marry her Prince Charming, someone who has selected her solely for her looks and who has so much power and status he'll be able to call the shots in their marriage? How satisfying will that marriage be for either of them?

I believe Cinderella didn't live happily ever after and the reasons are revealed in the many subtle messages present in the Grimms' fairy tales, particularly in the most beloved ones. In the next chapter, I'll review what fairy tales have to say about marrying up and the reasons it occurs.

3 | Love and Marriage: Who Marries Up and Why?

One could argue Cinderella is an isolated tale, so we shouldn't focus on it too much. What about the other fairy tales? What do they have to say about love and marriage, and particularly about marrying someone of a much higher status like a prince or king? It turns out they have a lot to say. Of the 200 Grimm fairy tales, there are fifty of them where a non-royal person marries a royal one. Thus, a king, prince, or princess marries someone beneath their status in one-quarter of the stories. Perhaps that's why we like them. Among the beloved eight stories, five of them have a female character who marries a prince. (These five are: Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Rapunzel.) The other three stories (Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, and Hansel and Gretel) do not.

Both Men and Women Marry Royalty Equally (But for Different Reasons)

Of the fifty stories where people marry up, in twenty-eight of them a non-royal man marries a princess and in twenty-two, a non-royal woman marries a prince or a king (See Table 1: **Marrying Up**). What differs is the reason the two genders marry royalty. Male characters marry up because of their actions in every single story—they engage in feats of bravery, defeat armies, and kill giants (See Table 2: **Reasons for Male Characters Marrying Up**). They often rescue princesses and are given the woman's hand in

marriage as a reward. Suitors will do impossible tasks to win the hand of a princess. These men prevail and get the woman in the end. In the story, *Strong Hans*, a man marries a princess after saving her.

> *Hans ran and ran without stopping, until he came to the sea shore, and there far, far out on the water, he perceived a little boat in which his faithless comrades were sitting; and in fierce anger he leapt, without thinking what he was doing...He swung his club and gave his wicked comrades the reward they merited and threw them into the water, and then he sailed with the beautiful maiden, who had been in the greatest alarm, and whom he delivered for the second time, home to her father and mother, and married her, and all rejoiced exceedingly. (Strong Hans)*

In contrast, female characters are often married simply because they're beautiful. Over half of them do so because of their appearance (See Table 3: **Reasons for Female Characters Marrying Up**). A comparison of males and females who marry up based on their appearance shows that no male character married royalty for this reason (See Table 4: **Gender and Marrying Because of Appearance**). In a couple of stories, the female characters cannot even talk, but their beauty is apparently enough. For example, in the story *Our Lady's Child,* a king comes upon a mute, naked beautiful woman in the forest.

> *The King of the country was hunting in the forest, and followed a roe, and as it had fled into the thicket which shut in this part of the forest, he got off his horse, tore the bushes asunder, and cut himself a path with his sword. When he had at last forced his way through, he saw a wonderfully beautiful maiden sitting under the tree; and she sat there and was entirely covered with her golden hair down to her feet. He stood still and looked at her full of surprise, then he spoke to her and said "Who art thou? Why art thou sitting here in the wilderness?" But she gave no answer, for she could not open her mouth. The King continued, "Wilt thou go with me to my castle? Then she just nodded her head a little. The King took her in his arms, carried her to his horse, and rode home with her, and when he reached the royal castle he caused her to be dressed in beautiful garments, and gave her all things in abundance. Although she could not speak, she was still so beautiful and charming that he began to love her with all his heart and it was not long before he married her." (Our Lady's Child)*

If I came upon a naked, mute woman in a forest, I'd wonder what her current issue might be. Mental illness would be at the top of the things I'd be considering. Beauty just wouldn't be relevant.

In many stories, just the appearance of a lovely woman is enough to generate a marriage proposal. For example, in *Little Brother and Little Sister*, a king proposes marriage within a few minutes.

> *Then the door opened, and the King walked in, and there stood a maiden more lovely than any he had ever seen. The maiden was frightened when she saw, not her little roe, but a man come in who wore a golden crown upon his head. But the King looked kindly at her, stretched out his hand, and said, "Will you go with me to my palace and be my dear wife?" (Little Brother and Little Sister)*

Perhaps this lack of realism is what we love about fairy tales. Few people are likely to propose marriage within minutes of meeting. Clearly love at first sight is alive and well in fairy tale land.

The underlying message, however, is clear. For many women to marry up, they must be beautiful.

Beastly Men

Although beauty is important for female fiancées, appearance isn't as important for male marriage partners. In several stories, women marry wildly inappropriate partners such as lions, hedgehogs, donkeys, and even an iron stove. In the story *Bearskin*, a woman is betrothed to a man who has not cut his beard or nails and who has not washed himself in years. Because he wears a bearskin, several characters think he's a bear at first. He stays at an inn and hears a man crying because he cannot pay his hotel bill. "Bearskin" pays the bill, and the father offers him his daughter as a form of repayment.

> *When the old man saw himself set free from all his troubles, he did not know how to be grateful enough. "Come with me," said he to Bearskin; "my daughters are all miracles of beauty, choose one of them for thyself as a wife." (Bearskin)*

The two older daughters reject the unkempt man, but the younger one agrees to fulfill her father's promise and thinks Bearskin is probably a good man. However, she doesn't look forward to the marriage at all and often cries when she considers it. The fact she's honoring a promise made for an inn payment seems extraordinary.

In numerous stories, the father arranges the marriage of his daughter as a reward to another man. In one story, a king betroths his daughter to a donkey who plays a lute. Apparently, this is the king's way of keeping the donkey from leaving his kingdom.

> *When the noble beast had stayed a long time at the King's Court, he thought, "What good does all this do me, I shall still have to go home again?" He let his head hang sadly, and went to the King and asked for his dismissal. But the King had grown fond of him, and said, "Little ass, what ails thee? Thou look as sour as a jug of vinegar, I will give thee what thou wantest. Dost thou want gold?" "No," said the donkey, and shook his head. "Dost though want jewels and rich dress?" "No." "Dost thou wish for half my kingdom" "Indeed, no." Then said the King, "if I did but know what would make thee content. Wilt though have my pretty daughter to wife?" "Ah, yes," said the ass, "I should indeed like her," and all at once he became quite merry and full of happiness, for that was exactly what he was wishing for. So a great and splendid wedding was held. (The Donkey)*

One of the other most beloved fairy tales where a woman has a romance with a non-human character is Beauty and the Beast, which has seen great commercial success for Disney with two movies, launched first in 1991 and then in 2017. Between the two movies, they grossed over $700 million domestically in revenue.[i] The films also launched dolls, costumes, and other merchandise such as watches and jewelry boxes. The original story was published in 1740 by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot deVilleneuve, a French novelist. It's been revised over the years and has been republished in shorter and slightly altered versions in the 18th and 19th century.[ii]

The story is about a beautiful woman named "Beauty" who decides to become the prisoner of a beast in order to save her father. She eventually

falls in love with the beast who is a handsome prince who was cursed by a witch and transformed into a beast. The only thing that will break his spell is if a young woman falls in love with him in his beastly form. In the 2017 movie version, the beast is a mean and tyrannical person cursed by a witch because he refused to help her when she was disguised as an elderly woman. In the original 1740 version, he was cursed because he refused to marry an elderly, ugly fairy who had fallen in love with him. In both versions, the love that Beauty eventually professes for the beast as he lays dying, transforms him into the handsome, young prince he was before the curse. After the transformation, the couple marry and live happily ever after.

Interestingly, although Beauty can see beyond the beast's exterior, it appears that the writer cannot when it comes to descriptions of her character. Beauty is constantly referred to in terms of her outward appearance; clearly one of the major things she's bringing to the arrangement is her attractiveness.

In the 2017 movie, the beast is depicted as huge, ugly, and covered in hair. The beast in the original story is described in the book as hideous and terrifying.

> *"The Beast made himself heard. A frightful noise, caused by the enormous weight of his body, by the terrible clank of his scales, and an awful roaring, announced his arrival. Terror took possession of Beauty."*[iii]

In the original story of Beauty and the Beast, the spell cannot be broken unless the heroine comes to his castle voluntarily. And in this story, it's clear Beauty believes she may be killed by the beast.

> *"Do you come here voluntarily?" inquired the Beast, "and will you consent to let your father depart without following him?" Beauty replied that she had no other intention.*
>
> *"Ah! And what do you think will become of you after his departure?"*

"What it may please you," said she; "my life is at your disposal, and I submit blindly to the fate which you may doom me to." [iv]

In the 2017 movie, Beauty is first placed into the cell her father occupied, then is offered a permanent room in the castle. She's alone except for the nightly visit she has with the beast. She is told she will no longer see her family. Her existence goes from terrifying to just lonely.

Imprisonment Leads to Love?

Is it normal for a person who is imprisoned to become enamored by their captors? Is this a fairy tale version of the Stockholm Syndrome, where a person who is held hostage eventually forms positive feelings for a captor?[v] The poster child for this syndrome is Patty Hearst, who was kidnapped and eventually helped her captors rob banks. She was pardoned by President Clinton, who believed she had not acted of her own volition.

Interestingly, the beast from the original story is uninteresting and stupid in his conversation as a result of the curse that's transformed him. And in the 2017 movie, he's downright rude to Beauty and yells at her twice. Why would imprisonment with such a being lead to love? Does this story work when we reverse the genders? If an ugly, stupid woman imprisoned a young, attractive man, would he be likely to fall in love with her over time?

What are we saying to women when we suggest they will love their captors in fairy tales and that they must see beyond the outward appearance and behavior of men? In contrast, women will be judged largely in terms of their appearance. Are we saying that men can behave badly and be unattractive but that women should be beautiful? What are we suggesting to women when we showcase stories where they sacrifice their family ties and live in solitary surroundings? If the outcome is marriage to a handsome prince, is it worth it?

Major Message: Men and women both marry up equally in fairy tales, but women primarily marry royalty because they're beautiful, whereas men marry due to their actions. Women in these stories love and marry animals or highly unappealing partners, including those who imprison them, whereas men do not.

4 | Engagements and Married Life

Fairy tales also describe what one can expect after the engagement and wedding.

Engagements and Poor Memories

Fairy tales often end with the engagement or marriage of the principal characters and the declaration they lived happily ever after. It sounds good, but is it true?

The first major impediment to happiness occurs right after the engagement, where some of the characters forget whom they're engaged to. It's one of the key storylines that occur in several Grimms' tales—a prince promises to marry a woman and then completely forgets (possibly due to magic). Often, he will become engaged to another woman and his initial beloved will search for him. In many stories, she will work in a low-level position, such as a scullery maid or cook within his kingdom, just to be near him. She will often go to a ball or public event and wear a gorgeous dress his current fiancée decides she must own.

The deal that's usually struck is the fiancée can have the dress if she lets the woman stay outside the bridegroom's sleeping chambers. The new fiancée will usually give the man a sleeping potion, so there won't be any conversation through the door. Typically, three dresses are exchanged for three nights. By the third night, he will be wise to the sleeping potion and will remain awake and discover his initial beloved. You might imagine the conversation would be a mixture of anger and regret, but it begins with the

old fiancée bemoaning the fact he doesn't remember her, and his sudden realization he was once engaged to her.

> *Suddenly his memory returned to him. "Ah," cried he, "how can I have acted so unfaithfully; but the kiss which in the joy of my heart I gave my parents, on the right cheek, that is to blame for it all, that is what stupefied me!" He sprang up, took the King's daughter by the hand, and led her to his parents' bed. "This is my true bride," said he, "if I marry the other, I shall do a great wrong." The parents, when they heard how everything had happened, gave their consent. (The Drummer)*

So, what's the implicit message here? Perhaps marriage proposals are easy to come by and just as easy to forget. Interestingly, in almost every story, the second fiancée felt the dresses were adequate compensation for losing a husband. I'm trying to imagine those dresses...

Married Life

Fairy tales are more focused on getting married than on actual marriage. The few descriptions of married life suggest it's a mixed experience. Husbands are described as abusive in several stories, where they threaten to beat their spouses who do foolish things.[i] In one story, a man holds his wife down and presses her head into a pillow until she "falls asleep."[ii] In another story, a man beats his wife too often and is punished for his transgression.[iii]

Wives, particularly non-royal ones, are often described as helpmates to their husbands and are often directed to do things such as cook, sell cows, and manage children. They often do as they're told, even when they don't agree. One male character told his wife to send each daughter out into the woods to bring him food, and each one disappeared. Even though she doesn't want to, she agrees to send the last daughter out, who gets lost just like her sisters.

> *On the third morning the wood-cutter said to his wife, "Send our youngest child out with my dinner today, she has always been good and obedient, and will stay in the right path, and not run about after every wild humble-bee, as her sisters did." The mother did not want to do it, and said, "Am I to lose my dearest child as well?" (The Hut in the Forest)*

Although men tend to be in charge, there are several wives who have strong personalities and can make their husbands' lives difficult. In *The Fisherman and his Wife*, a man catches a fish who is an enchanted prince, and asks to be thrown back. The man does so, but his wife entreats him to return and ask the magic fish to transform her hovel into a small cottage. The fish grants her wish, and they own a lovely cottage filled with nice furniture and a pretty yard. Despite this new house, the woman remains unsatisfied and continues to ask for things. She eventually asks and receives castles, kingdoms, and titles, until she becomes the Pope. The husband and enchanted fish eventually become disgusted by her greed, and the fish eventually puts the couple back in the original hovel.

Marriage appears challenging in the stories where a husband or wife is lazy or stupid. One woman is instructed by her husband to make dinner, but she ends up feeding the sausages to the dog, as well as letting a keg of beer pour onto the floor of her basement. And if that's not enough, she eventually forgets her identity.[iv] Another wife also suffers from this type of memory loss and runs away from home.[v] One man is so lazy he cannot bother to take his goat into the field, so he marries a woman with a goat so she will take care of it.[vi]

Grimms' fairy tales also touch on the more serious topics of murder and adultery in marriage. Three stories deal with adultery, but they only portray women cheating on husbands.[vii] When it comes to murder, that happens frequently. In one story a queen tries to kill her husband (and in two cases succeeds). In *Three Snake-Leaves*, after a king brings his wife back to life, she repays him by trying to murder him.

A change had, however, taken place in his wife; after she had been restored to life, it seemed as if all love for her husband had gone out of her heart. After some time, when he wanted to make a voyage over the sea, to visit his old father, and they had gone on board a ship, she forgot the great love and fidelity which he had shown her, and which had been the means of rescuing her from death, and conceived a wicked inclination for the skipper. And once when the young King lay there asleep, she called in the skipper and seized the sleeper by the head, and the skipper took him by the feet, and thus they threw him down into the sea. (The Three Snake-Leaves)

The king dies, but luckily a servant brings him back to life.

Second wives are particularly problematic and very mean to their stepchildren. Cinderella is not an isolated example of this problem. There is not one instance of a stepmother being kind to her stepchildren in any fairy tale. This topic will be explored later when evil is discussed in Chapter 7.

Thus, marriage is a mixed experience for the characters within fairy tales. This sentiment is described well in one story where a woman wishes to marry a man, so she sends the man's daughter with a message about her desire. His reaction and method of deciding what to do are noteworthy.

The man said, "What shall I do? Marriage is a joy and also a torment." At length as he could come to no decision, he pulled off his boot, and said, "Take this boot, it has a hole in the sole of it. Go with it up to the loft, hang it on the big nail, and then pour water into it. If it hold the water, then I will again take a wife, but if it run through, I will not." The girl did as she was ordered, but the water drew the hole together, and the boot became full to the top. She informed her father how it had turned out. Then he himself went up, and when he saw that she was right, he went to the widow and wooed her, and the wedding was celebrated. (The Three Little Men in the Wood)

Major Message: Engagements don't always lead to marriages, and once they occur, they're not always happy, regardless of whether one marries royalty or not.

5 | Agency in Fairy Tales: Who is Active and Why

If you want to experience the most passive people in the universe, then meet Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, and a variety of other female characters who let life happen to them. They represent an extreme version of female passivity.

Briar Rose and Sleeping Beauty

The Grimms' version of Sleeping Beauty is called *Briar Rose* and it's a story about the dangers of not inviting important guests to auspicious occasions. In this story, the king and queen desperately want a child and are eventually granted their desire. When their little daughter is born, the king invites twelve of the thirteen Wise Women to celebrate her birth. Apparently, they only have twelve golden plates, so one isn't invited. Each of the wise women bestows a magic gift on the infant until the last one is ready to bestow hers. At this point, the uninvited woman joins the festivities and declares that the child will prick her finger and die at the age of fifteen. Because the last woman has not given her magical gift, she changes this curse from death to a deep sleep for 100 years.

All happens as decreed, and the young princess pricks her finger with a spindle and falls deeply asleep for 100 years, along with the rest of the castle. A large and impenetrable hedge of thorns grows around the castle. Apparently, many are aware that there is a beautiful sleeping princess inside, but no one can conquer the thorny exterior. Numerous princes die trying. After 100 years, a prince learns of the famous princess and tries to

get into the castle. Although he's well aware that others have tried and died, he remains unafraid. Luckily his timing is right, the hedge parts and he finds the sleeping princess inside and kisses her. She awakes, along with the rest of the castle, and the two are immediately married.

Snow White

This story is about jealousy, specifically the jealousy of a stepmother toward her more beautiful stepdaughter. The stepmother asks her mirror everyday who is the fairest in the kingdom and is happy until she learns her stepdaughter is the prettiest in the land. The queen can't bear to hear that so she has a huntsman take the seven-year-old child into the woods to kill her. Snow White begs for her life, runs away, and finds herself at a cottage where seven dwarfs live. The dwarfs invite her to clean and cook for them in exchange for living there. All goes well until the queen discovers the girl is still alive, and she disguises herself as a peddler and tries to kill her. She laces her stays too tightly, sells her a poisonous comb, and then encourages her to eat a poisonous apple. The apple eventually does her in, and she appears dead, although she's actually in a deep sleep.

The dwarfs install her in a glass coffin. She appears as radiant as ever, and a prince falls in love with her and tries to take her back to his kingdom. During the trip, the pallbearers stumble over a tree stump and the jarring motion knocks the piece of poisonous apple out of Snow White's throat. She awakes and the prince immediately proposes marriage to her. The wicked stepmother comes to the wedding and is punished for her misdeeds.

Beautiful (and Sleepy)

In both stories, the heroines are unbelievably passive characters who sleep through much of their stories. Their major attribute is their beauty. In the Grimms' fairytale, there is no description of Snow White's character and the only notable thing mentioned is that she does the cooking, washing, sewing, and knitting for them in exchange for her room and board. She is, however, described as the most beautiful female in the kingdom. Sleeping Beauty's character and appearance are the result of the magic bestowed upon her by the Wise Women or fairies.

"Meanwhile the gifts of the Wise Women were plenteously fulfilled on the young girl, for she was so beautiful, modest, good-natured, and wise, that everyone who saw her was bound to love her." (Briar Rose)

The most active characters in both of these stories are the princes and the evil stepmother. Once again, passive women are unfairly treated by other women who are jealous or angry. Their mistreatment is not due to anything they've done, and they're true victims in these stories.

So why is a beautiful, sleeping woman so attractive? Is there an unstated sexual aspect to these stories that makes these docile women particularly alluring? Or do we associate women with passivity and thus a beautiful woman who is sleeping just represents her gender in a way we understand? What are we saying to men when we suggest a sleeping woman should be pursued and kissed without her consent? What message are we giving to young girls—that they may awaken from dreams to find themselves claimed by someone they don't know?

An Analysis of Agency

To understand agency in fairy tales, my firm Beall Research, Inc., coded the Grimms' stories in terms of whether there is an active male or female character in each story. There are 200 stories—169 with a main human protagonist. In these 169 stories, we identified if there is an active male or active female character, or both. For example, in Hansel and Gretel, Hansel takes pebbles and puts them along the path so they can find their way home, whereas Gretel pushes the witch into the oven. Therefore, both characters are active.

Interestingly, there is no active character in sixteen of the stories. In the remaining 153 tales, there is an active male character in 81% of these stories and an active female character in 28% of them (See Table 5: **Active, Agentic Characters**). Thus, male characters are generally more active than female ones.

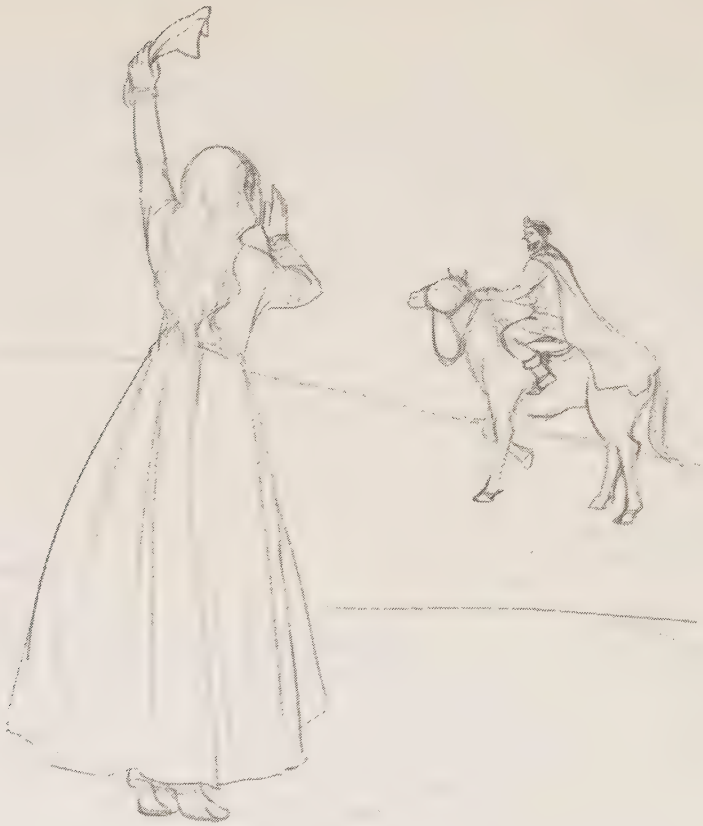
Male characters are most likely to battle giants, take on witches, solve riddles, and prevail in situations that seem insurmountable. They are sometimes helped by magical creatures, animals, or humans who bestow

special gifts or specific, helpful knowledge. But in the end, they're tenacious, which leads them to succeed in their goals. Sometimes they set out with a desire to tackle the impossible and at other times, they find themselves in situations that are difficult but unavoidable. Women, in contrast, become active in fairy tales when they're looking for someone—often brothers or a fiancée who jilted them because he forgot they were engaged.

However, there are some notable women who are impressive in terms of the actions they take in response to their situations. In *The Glass Coffin*, a woman rejects the advances of an evil suitor and tries to shoot him. In *Fitcher's Bird*, a woman outwits a wizard who kidnaps her, and she alerts her relatives, who then set his house on fire. In *The Twelve Huntsmen*, a woman is jilted by a king so she and eleven other women (who look like her) join his hunting group and hunt alongside him until he recognizes his fiancée and fulfills his promise. In the *Peasant's Daughter*, a poor, smart girl marries a king, but angers him. He decides to banish her from his kingdom, telling her she can take only the one thing dearest to her. She drugs him and he awakens in her father's home, where she tells him she took the one thing that mattered most to her: him. He forgives her and they reconcile. And my favorite example of a strong-willed woman occurs in this story.

> *Once on a time when he was riding forth from his castle with his huntsmen, three girls were watching their cows upon the mountain, and when they saw the King with all his followers, the eldest girl pointed to him, and called to the two other girls, "If I do not get that one, I will have none." Then the second girl answered from the other side of the hill, and pointed to the one who was on the King's right hand, "Hilloa! hilloa! If I do not get him, I will have no one." These, however, were the two ministers. The King heard all this, and when he had come back from the chase, he caused the three girls to be brought to him, and asked them what they had said yesterday on the mountain. This they would not tell him, so the King asked the eldest if she really would take him for her husband? Then she said, 'Yes," and the two*

ministers married the two sisters, for they were all three fair and beautiful of face, especially the Queen, who had hair like flax. (The Three Little Birds)



Thus, although men are generally the most agentic characters, there are numerous women who are also active. These ladies are not well represented in the most beloved fairy tales .

Major Message: The majority of active characters in fairy tales are male. Females tend to be less agentic, and in the beloved ones like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, they're mostly asleep. There are a few exceptions, but these female characters are not well known or popular.

6 | Who is Powerful and Who Suffers?

Who are the powerful characters in fairy tales? Power is the ability to direct or influence the behavior of others and the course of events. For example, the beast in the story, Beauty and the Beast, has power, but the witch who cursed him also has a great deal of power. Both characters have a huge impact on several people and the situation resulting from the power they wield.

There is probably no greater example of differential power than in the story Hansel and Gretel who find themselves alone, hungry, and looking for shelter in a forest. They encounter an old woman who invites them into her cottage, but they soon learn she has a specific agenda, which is grisly to say the least.

> *The old woman had only pretended to be so kind; she was in reality a wicked witch, who lay in wait for children, and had only built the little house of bread in order to entice them there. When a child fell into her power, she killed it, cooked and ate it, and that was feast day with her... When Hansel and Grethel came into her neighborhood, she laughed maliciously, and said mockingly, "I have them, they shall not escape me again!" Early in the morning before the children were awake, she was already up, and when she saw both of them sleeping and looking so pretty, with their plump red cheeks, she muttered to herself, "That will be a dainty mouthful!" Then she*

> *seized Hansel with her shrivelled hand, carried him into a little stable, and shut him in with a grated door. He might scream as he liked, that was of no use. Then she went to Grethel, shook her till she awoke, and cried, "Get up, lazy thing, fetch some water, and cook something good for thy brother, he is in the stable outside, and is to be made fat. When he is fat, I will eat him." Grethel began to weep bitterly, but it was all in vain, she was forced to do what the wicked witch ordered her. (Hansel and Grethel)*

One cannot imagine less powerful characters than children lost in the woods and a more powerful person than an adult with supernatural powers and the means to shelter and feed them.

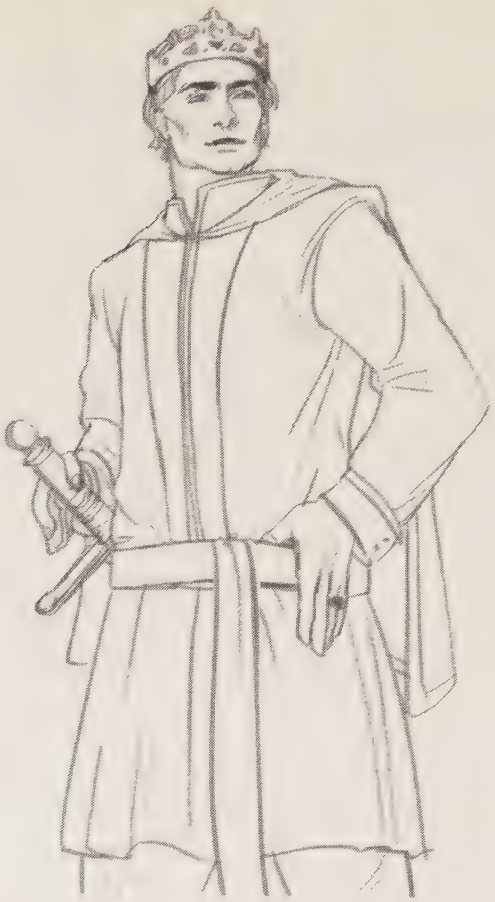
A Power Analysis

We also analyzed who had the most power in each of the Grimms' fairy tales. In 141 of the stories, there was a human who had an impact on others. The individual who had the greatest impact was identified as the person with the most power. For example, in Hansel and Gretel, the little girl ultimately has the most power because she has the greatest impact on other characters when she kills the witch by pushing her into the oven. In eight of the stories, the most powerful individual was not human, but a wolf, death, St. Peter, The Lord, or the Devil. These characters are non-human males, so they were not included in the analysis.

We discovered the most powerful human being was a man 80% of the time (See Table 6: **Most Powerful Character in Each Story**). It could be a king who made his daughter marry a donkey or a man who learns about the power of a magic set of things and uses them against a thief.[i]

Women are the most powerful characters only 20% of the time and they're often evil stepmothers who cause problems for their stepchildren. They're also sisters searching for brothers who have been cast under evil spells or women trying to find bridegrooms who have jilted them. The remaining women who have power tend to be evil witches. However, generally power in fairy tale land is held by men.

Among royalty, male characters again have the most power (See Table 7: **Royalty and Power**). Kings are the most powerful characters over half of the time, princes are most powerful about one-third of the time, and princesses are most powerful about 12% of the time. Queens, sadly, are only powerful 3% of the time. Thus, power among royalty resides with kings and princes.



Who Suffers?

Suffering is a common occurrence in fairy tales and is usually perpetrated by a powerful character. We coded who causes and receives the most suffering within each story. Suffering is any type of physical or emotional pain caused by another character. We coded whether a male or female caused the suffering and the gender of the character who suffered. Examples of suffering include being physically or psychologically mistreated, being kidnapped, imprisoned, marrying against one's will, being beaten, etc. There are many examples. In one tale, a father and daughter find a golden mortar on their land, which was given to them by the king. When the father brings it to the king, he suffers as a result.

> *He...took the mortar and carried it to the King, said that he had found it in the cleared land, and asked if he would accept it as a present. The King took the mortar, and asked if he had found nothing besides that? "No," answered the countryman. Then the King said he must now bring him the pestle. The peasant said they had not found that, but he might just as well have spoken to the wind; he was put in prison, and was to stay there until he produced the pestle. The servants had daily to carry him bread and water, which is what people get in prison..." (The Peasant's Wise Daughter)*

Suffering can occur for a variety of reasons and isn't limited to common folks. Royalty also suffers, sometimes at the hands of their family members. Maid Maleen learned this in the story named after her.

> *There was once a King who had a son who asked in marriage the daughter of a mighty King; she was called Maid Maleen, and was very beautiful. As her father wished to give her to another, the prince was rejected; but as they both loved each other with all their hearts, they would not give each other up, and Maid Maleen said to her father, "I can and will take no other for my husband." Then the King flew into a passion, and ordered a dark tower to be*

> *built, into which no ray of sunlight or moonlight should enter. When it was finished, he said, "Therein shalt thou be imprisoned for seven years, and then I will come to see if thy perverse sprit is broken." (Maid Maleen)*

Men cause and receive the most suffering (See Table 8: **Suffering**). Males cause suffering about two-thirds of the time compared to females, who cause suffering about one-third of the time. But interestingly, men tend to suffer the most. About two thirds of the time, men are the ones who suffer, whereas women suffer about one-third of the time.

When one reviews suffering by gender, men cause other men to suffer over one-third of the time and cause women to suffer almost one-quarter of the time. Women cause men to suffer one-quarter of the time and they cause suffering for other women the remaining 15% of the time.

This pattern doesn't hold for the most popular stories. In these tales, women cause the most suffering to other women. *Cinderella, Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs, Sleeping Beauty,* and *Rapunzel* are all stories that showcase women doing terrible things to other women—and most of these perpetrators are stepmothers. The other two beloved stories, Beauty and the Beast and Hansel and Gretel, have witches who cause suffering to both males and females. And the other two popular stories, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, don't have a human character who is causing any problems. The wolf is the major antagonist in Little Red Riding Hood.

Significant suffering occurs as a result of the actions of these stepmothers and witches—sometimes from a stepmother who is also a witch. Children suffer most terribly.

> *Little brother took his little sister by the hand and said, "Since our mother died we have had no happiness; our step-mother beats us every day, and if we come near her she kicks us away with her foot. Our meals are the hard crusts of bread that are left over; and the little dog under the table is better off, for she often throws it a nice bit. May Heaven pity us. If our mother only knew! Come, we will go forth together into the wide world. (Little Brother and Little Sister)*

Who is Confined and Who is Bewitched?

One type of suffering is being confined against one's will—being kidnapped, imprisoned in a tower or dungeon, or being married to a person whom one doesn't want to marry. In the 169 stories, 60 characters are confined against their will. An example of this occurs in *Faithful John*, which is a story about a king who falls in love with a portrait of a princess. He has his servant, John, gather golden wares to impress her and they sail to her palace. John poses as a merchant and he entreats the princess to come to his ship to see his goods.

> *Faithful John was quite delighted, and led her to the ship, and when the King saw her, he perceived that her beauty was even greater than the picture had represented it to be, and thought no other than that his heart would burst in twain. Then she got into the ship, and the King led her within. Faithful John, however, remained behind with the pilot, and ordered the ship to be pushed off, saying "Set all sail, till it fly like a bird in the air." Within, however, the King showed her the golden vessels, every one of them, also the wide beasts and strange animals. Many hours went by whilst she was seeing everything, and in her delight she did not observe that the ship was sailing away. After she had looked at the last, she thanked the merchant and wanted to go home, but when she came to the side of the ship, she saw that it was on the deep sea far from land, and hurrying onwards with all sail set. "Ah, cried she in alarm, I am betrayed! I am carried away and have fallen into the power of a merchant—I would rather die!" (Faithful John)*

When we analyzed the number of male and female characters who are imprisoned, confined or married against their will, we found that female characters are more likely to experience this situation than males (See **Table 9: Gender of Character Confined in Story**).

Amazingly, after the princess in the Faithful John story bemoans being kidnapped, the king explains he is royalty and that it's only out of love for

her that he decided to carry her away. Apparently, this answer is sufficiently comforting to the princess, and she agrees to become his wife. I'm not sure about you, but I tend to prefer more traditional forms of courtship.

We also analyzed who is bewitched in stories and gets changed into an animal, statue, or other inanimate object such as a stove. The most common transformation seems to occur for princes who are changed into frogs, ravens, swans, horses, and other creatures. Witches and wizards are generally behind these spells, and they often require some type of feat to release the person who has been bewitched. In the story *Iron Stove*, a prince must find someone who will scrape a hole in the exterior of the stove in order to release him. In many stories it's unclear why the person was bewitched. Apparently just wishing that someone is changed can cause that to occur. For example, in *The Seven Ravens*, a father gets impatient with his seven sons and angrily wishes that they were ravens. As soon as he utters those words, the boys become ravens and fly away. And in *The Six Swans*, a queen who is a witch changes her stepsons to get them out of her life.

> *"The children , who saw from a distance that some one was approaching, thought that their dear father was coming to them, and full of joy, ran to meet him. Then she threw one of the little shirts over each of them, and no sooner had the shirts touched their bodies than they were changed into swans, and flew away over the forest. The Queen went home quite delighted, and thought she had got rid of her step-children. (The Six Swans)*

We analyzed whether males or females are more likely to be bewitched. Of the 52 characters who are bewitched, over half of them were men and the remaining number were women. We conducted a statistical analysis to determine if this is a statistically significant difference and it's not (See **Table 10: Gender of Bewitched Character**). So men and women are equally likely to be bewitched.

Major Message: Men tend to be the most powerful characters in fairy tales. Among royalty, kings and princes are the most powerful, whereas

queens are the least powerful. Male characters tend to cause the most suffering—to other men. But in the eight most popular fairy tales, women have a high degree of power, and they primarily cause suffering to other women. Characters who are confined against their will are usually females. But when it comes to being bewitched, male and female characters are equally likely to have a spell cast upon them.

7 | Good Overcomes Evil – But When and For Whom?

If you like the idea of a good person prevailing against an evil one, then fairy tales are made for you. *Snow White* is one of the best examples of a story where a good character eventually triumphs over an evil one. Snow White is purely good and her stepmother is completely evil and bent on destroying a defenseless little girl because she is so pretty.

> *Then the Queen was shocked, and turned yellow and green with envy. From that hour, whenever she looked at Snow-white, her heart heaved in her breast, she hated the girl so much. And envy and pride grew higher and higher in her heart like a weed, so that she had no peace day or night. She called a huntsman, and said "Take the child away into the forest; I will no longer have her in my sight. Kill her, and bring me back her heart as a token." (Little Snow-White)*

When her first attempt to murder Snow White fails, she tries again. Interestingly, the dwarfs seem more aware of the potential for this danger than Snow White does. They warn her not to let anyone into the cottage, but she's easily fooled and lets the queen into her home when the woman dresses up as a peddler selling wares. Apparently Snow White isn't very intelligent, given that she manages to fall for the same ruse three times.

The queen uses witchcraft to create her disguises and the implements for killing. She also possesses an omniscient talking mirror. Her royal position and skills have made her extremely powerful, especially against a young, trusting, and somewhat unintelligent girl. But Snow White is eventually saved by a prince. When the queen learns Snow White is alive and about to marry the prince, she goes to the wedding, where justice is delivered swiftly.

> *At first she would not go to the wedding at all, but she had no peace, and must go to see the young Queen. And when she went in she knew Snow White; and she stood still with rage and fear, and could not stir. But iron slippers had already been put upon the fire, and they were brought in with tongs, and set before her. Then she was forced to put on the red-hot shoes, and dance until she dropped down dead. (Little Snow-White)*

This story does a great job of showing good overcoming evil—and it's incredibly clear who is good, who suffers, and who is eventually rewarded and punished.

Who Vanquishes Evil?

As already discussed, suffering is a common part of fairy tales, but who is typically the character who overcomes evil and makes everything right in the end? We identified a clear demonstration of a good person overcoming an evil one in 106 stories. In the other tales, there is no good or evil character who triumphs in the end. In general, however, stories where evil characters prevail are rare.

We analyzed which character vanquished evil in each story. For example, a king who condemns a witch to death for her evil deeds would be the person who vanquished evil in that story. Interestingly, the most powerful person sometimes isn't always the one who sets things straight. For example, witches were sometimes the most powerful people in stories, but they were not the ones who conquered evil.

We found that in 81% of these 106 stories, the person who vanquished evil is a male character, whereas only 19% of the time it's a female one (See Table 11: **Vanquishing Evil**). And in one third of all stories, the person who conquers evil is royalty—a king, queen, princess, or prince. The vast majority of these royal characters are men. Thus, men vanquish evil, particularly royal men.

An example of a royal man defeating evil occurs in the story *The White Bride and the Black One*. In this fairy tale, a king is fooled into marrying an evil, ugly woman who is the stepsister to a lovely woman he intended to marry. An evil stepmother, who is also a witch, engineers this situation and turns the original fiancée into a duck. Apparently, the duck eventually reveals her identity to a kitchen boy. The king cuts the duck's neck, and she transforms into the beautiful maiden whom he initially wished to marry.

> *The King was full of joy, and as she stood there quite wet, he caused splendid apparel to be brought and had her clothed in it. Then she told how she had been betrayed by cunning and falsehood, and at last thrown down into the water, and her first request was that her brother should be brought forth from the pit of snakes, and when the King had fulfilled this request, he went into the chamber where the old witch was, and asked, What does she deserve who does this and that? and related what had happened. Then was she so blinded that she was aware of nothing and said, "She deserves to be stripped naked, and put into a barrel with nails, and that a horse should be harnessed to the barrel, and the horse sent all over the world." All of which was done to her, and to her black daughter. But the King married the white and beautiful bride, and rewarded her faithful brother, and made him a rich and distinguished man. (The White Bride and the Black One)*

Good, Powerful Men and Bad, Evil Women

If we examine who has power and who is good and evil, an interesting pattern emerges. Powerful men are usually good, whereas powerful women

are almost equally split between good and evil (See Table 12: **Goodness, Evil and Gender**, Table 13: **Male Characters, Goodness and Power**, Table 14: **Female Characters, Goodness and Power**). Thus, one out of every two powerful women is evil, but most powerful men in fairy tale land are benevolent. So, if you come across a man with power, you can probably bet he's good, but if it's a powerful female character, you're just as likely to find a good apple as a bad one.

So, what's the message fairy tales are saying about powerful women? If they're equally likely to be good or evil, powerful women must be handled carefully. They can certainly create a lot of suffering, and one can't always immediately determine if they're good or evil. Thus, powerful women are risky. Perhaps it's best to assume they're evil unless told otherwise, given the preponderance of them. And isn't that how we sometimes think of powerful women?

This finding reminds me of a Saturday Night Live skit in which the comedian Amy Poehler portrayed Hillary Clinton throwing a Halloween party. She's dressed in a white wedding dress. As she approaches her guests, each one remarks on her great witch costume. When she explains that she's dressed as a bride, they immediately see their faux pas. "Oh, I see it now. It's all in how you wear it, I guess," says one guest at the party.[i]

In fairy tales, powerful female characters range from witches and stepmothers, who are clearly evil when they're introduced into a story, to old women with magical powers who often help less powerful characters. One example occurs in the story, *The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs*. A king tries to separate his son-in-law from his daughter by insisting he fetch three golden hairs from the head of the devil to retain his marriage. The man goes to hell, where the devil's grandmother turns him into an ant and pulls out three of the devil's hairs for him. Not only does she give him the golden hairs, she finds out the answers to three major questions he has, which eventually helps him and several other characters in the story.[ii]

Powerful women are generally influential because of witchcraft, whereas powerful men are influential because of their position—often because they're royalty. Thus, it appears men have legitimate power, whereas women do not. As already discussed, being royalty tends to beget power only for men, not women. Being a queen doesn't necessarily lead

one to have power by virtue of one's position. Witches and stepmothers seem to have the most power.

Royal Men Vanquish Witches

So, what does this all mean? It means in cases where an evil woman is vanquished, it's likely through a good and powerful man, often a royal one. The storyline is very clear: an evil witch/stepmother does terrible things and a good king or prince ultimately delivers justice. And the power structure is clear—he has power through a position whereas she holds power through some type of black arts.

An example of this storyline occurs in the fairy tale, *Little Brother & Little Sister*, where a queen is suffocated by an evil witch and her daughter after she's given birth. The ugly daughter is substituted in the queen's place until the king realizes what's happened. His true queen appears in a ghostly form and nurses her child.

> *Then the King could not restrain himself; he sprang towards her, and said, "You can be none other than my dear wife." She answered, "Yes, I am your dear wife," and at the same moment she received life again, and by God's grace became fresh, rosy, and full of health.*
>
> *Then she told the King the evil deed which the wicked witch and her daughter had been guilty of towards her. The King ordered both to be led before the judge, and judgement was delivered against them. (Little Brother & Little Sister)*

Witches seem to hold a particularly contemptible position. These women are generally described as ugly and old. Sometimes they are likened to animals.

> *"But the wicked step-mother was a witch, and had seen how the two children had gone away, and had crept after them privily, as witches do creep..." (Little Brother and Little Sister)*

> *"Witches have red eyes, and cannot see far, but they have a keen scent like the beasts, and are aware when human beings draw near." (Hansel and Grethel)*

Other descriptions suggest that they are human women with special powers.

> *"There was once an old castle in the midst of a large and thick forest, and in it an old woman who was a witch dwelt all alone. In the day-time she changed herself into a cat or a screech owl, but in the evening she took her proper shape again as a human being." (Jorinda and Joringel)*

Regardless of the depiction, witches are generally despised. One common thing they do is transform people into animals or inanimate objects like statues. Witches also can change themselves into various disguises, including animals and attractive women. They sometimes look kind and sweet. Thus, the message is reiterated that powerful women have tremendous powers and are not always obviously evil in appearance. Their true appearance is ugly, but given their ability to transform themselves, one must be on guard. Witches often extract promises or fool their victims into making deals that are extremely disadvantageous.

> *"When evening drew near he stopped and looked around him, and then he saw that he had lost his way. He sought a way out, but could find none. Then*

he perceived an aged woman with a head which nodded perpetually, who came towards him, but she was a witch. "Good woman," said he to her, "Can you not show me the way through forest?" "Oh yes, Lord King," she answered, "that I certainly can, but on one condition, and if you do not fulfil that, you will never get out of the forest, and will die of hunger in it."

"What kind of condition is it?" asked the King.

"I have a daughter," said the old woman, "who is as beautiful as any one in the world, and well deserves to be your consort, and if you will make her your Queen, I will show you the way out of the forest." In the anguish of his heart the King consented. (The Six Swans)

The male version of this character is a wizard and there are few of them in Grimms' fairy tales. One notable wizard appears in the story *Fitcher's Bird*, where a wizard takes the form of a poor beggar man who captures pretty girls and takes them to his magnificent home and tests them. The women who fail the test are killed. It's gruesome.[iii]

Major Message: Powerful men are usually good, whereas powerful women are almost equally split between good and evil. Powerful men tend to be royalty, whereas powerful women are not—they tend to be witches and stepmothers. Royal men are generally the ones who vanquish evil in fairy tales. Thus, good and powerful kings and princes tend to conquer evil, powerful witches and stepmothers (who are not generally royal).

8 | Common Characters and What They Reveal

The most common characters in Grimms' fairy tales are royalty (e.g., king, queen, prince, princess), as well as non-royal men such as huntsmen, tailors, woodcutters, and women who range from the older married wives to young unmarried ladies. These characters reveal a great deal about what life is like for royalty, as well as for regular people.

Emotions Reveal a Great Deal

Do you want to know what it's like to be a prince, princess, king, or queen? Our analysis of these characters' emotions reveals much about their inner lives and how they experience different events. These emotions also tell us about the quality of their life during the story.

My firm coded the four most important emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, and fear for all the major characters (See Table 15: **Characters and Emotions**). We selected these emotions because they're among the six basic ones identified by psychologists.[i] Psychologists have identified these as the universal emotions because they're identified accurately across cultures. The other two universal emotions are contempt and surprise. We did not code contempt because it's never clearly described in the stories. We also didn't code surprise because it's a momentary expression and doesn't reveal as much about major events and ongoing issues for characters.

Kings

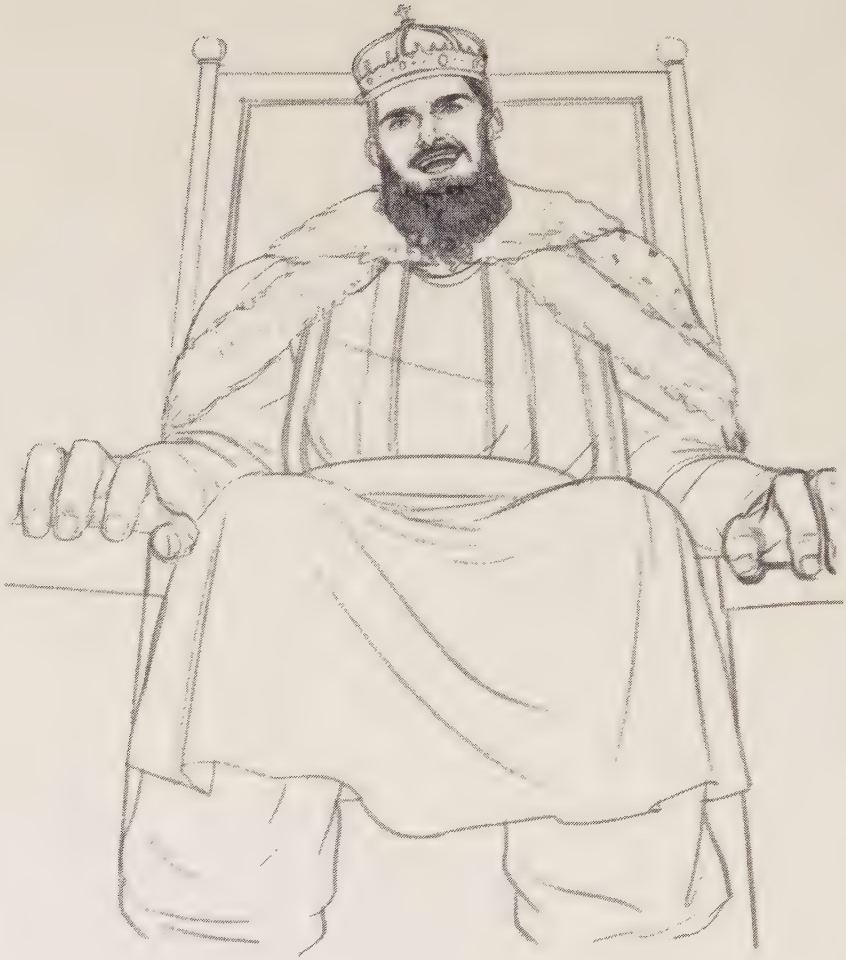
The top of the food chain are clearly kings. As discussed in the previous chapter, they're powerful because of their position. However, they're not infallible and sometimes make errors. A common mistake kings make is marrying the wrong woman, which is the result of trickery. An example of this occurs in the story *The Three Little Men in the Wood*, where a stepmother substitutes her ugly daughter for a queen. Eventually he figures it out, but not for a while.

Although kings are occasionally tricked, they tend to be good guys at heart and often do the right thing. They often marry women who are suffering. In several stories, a beautiful woman who is being victimized by an evil stepmother is saved by a king who marries her.

> *Then the stepmother was still more enraged, and thought of nothing but how to do every possible injury to the man's daughter, whose beauty, however, grew daily greater. At length, she took a cauldron, set it on the fire, and boiled yarn in it. When it was boiled, she flung it on the poor girl's shoulder, and gave her an axe in order that she might go on the frozen river, cut a hole in the ice, and rinse the yarn. She was obedient, went thither and cut a hole in the ice; and while she was in the midst of her cutting, a splendid carriage came driving up, in which sat the King. The carriage stopped, and the King asked, "My child, who are thou, and what art thou doing here?" "I am a poor girl, and I am rinsing yarn." Then the King felt compassion, and when he saw that she was so very beautiful, he said to her, "Wilt thou go away with me?" "Ah, yes, with all my heart," she answered, for she was glad to get away from the mother and sister.*
>
> *So she got into the carriage and drove away with the King, and when they arrived at his palace, the wedding was celebrated with great pomp..." (The Three Little Men in the Wood)*

Kings usually are the ones who correct injustices—generally at the end of the story. In *The Three Little Men in the Wood*, the king asks the stepmother what punishment is appropriate for a what she's done and she pronounces the person should be put into a barrel full of nails and then rolled down hill into water. And that's how he punishes the woman and her daughter.

Not surprisingly, kings are one of the happiest characters and over one-third of their expressions are ones of happiness. The emotion they express next in frequency is anger, which tends to occur when one's goals are blocked by someone.[ii] Anger is highly related to status; people believe those who express anger are more likely to be higher in status.[iii] Thus, anger is related to power and status, so it's not surprising when one of the most powerful, high-status characters expresses anger over one quarter of the time. The expression next in frequency for kings is sadness. Fear is rare for them. Thus, these are powerful, happy characters who are prone to some anger and sadness but are generally not fearful. In fairy tale land, it's good to be king.



Queens

In contrast, being a queen doesn't appear to be as good of an experience. As already discussed, queens are not powerful, and they are often under siege by other women who wish to take their place and become queen. Mother-in-laws also try to have queens removed, and in several

stories are successful. Queens have the unfortunate luck of having their children taken from them and are sometimes blamed for their murder. This plot is common.

> *The King, however, had a wicked mother who was dissatisfied with this marriage and spoke ill of the young Queen...After a year had passed, when the queen brought her first child into the world, the old woman took it away from her, and smeared her mouth with blood as she slept. Then she went to the King and accused the Queen of being a man-eater." (The Six Swans)*

Sadly, the person who generally pronounces the queen's sentence is her husband. Thus, queens are at the mercy of kings potentially banishing them to fortresses or determining they must be executed.

> *"When they had lived happily together for a few years, the King's mother, who was a wicked woman, began to slander the young Queen, and said to the King, "This is a common beggar girl whom thou hast brought back with thee. Who knows what impious trick she practises secretly! Even if she be dumb, and not able to speak, she still might laugh for once; but those who do not laugh have bad consciences." At first the King would not believe it, but the old woman urged this so long, and accused her of so many evil things, that at last the King let himself be persuaded and sentenced her to death." (The Twelve Brothers)*

Given the horrendous things that happen to queens and their lack of power, it's no surprise the most common emotion they express is sadness followed by happiness, which is often due to being saved in the nick of time or being reunited with lost family members. Queens occasionally express fear and anger. Thus, in fairy tale land, being a queen is a dangerous position to have because others are plotting against you and you're at the mercy of kings.

Princes

Princes are among the happiest and most active characters. These individuals tend to save women, often princesses, and they're rewarded by marrying the damsel who was in distress. *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty* all have this story line. However, being a prince can be dangerous.

> *"But round about the castle there began to grow a hedge of thorns, which every year became higher, and at last grew close up round the castle and all over it, so that there was nothing of it to be seen, not even the flag upon the roof. But the story of the beautiful sleeping "Briar-Rose," for so the princess was named, went about the country, so that from time to time kings' sons came and tried to get through the thorny hedge into the castle.*
> *But they found it impossible, for the thorns held fast together, as if they had hands, and the youths were caught in them, could not get loose again, and died a miserable death." (Briar Rose)*

Princes often exhibit a high level of daring and they have incredible adventures. In the story *The Golden Bird*, a prince is asked to find a golden bird, a golden horse, and the princess who lives in a golden castle. He experiences tremendous difficulties to win his prizes and is even thrown into prison. When he finally prevails, his brothers throw him down a well, steal the bird, horse, and princess. Eventually he is rescued and reunited with his animals and his princess. He marries her and is pronounced king.

Princes are very sought-after marriage partners due to their potential to be kings. But sometimes they don't have the ability to choose their mates because their parents interfere with an engagement.

> *"There was once a King's son who was betrothed to a maiden whom he loved very much. And when he was sitting beside her and very happy, news came that his father lay sick unto death, and desired to see him once again*

before his end. Then he said to his beloved, "I must now go and leave thee, I give thee a ring as a remembrance of me. When I am King, I will return and fetch thee." So he rode away, and when he reached his father, the latter was dangerously ill, and near his death. He said to him, "Dear son, I wished to see thee once again before my end, promise me to marry as I wish," and he named a certain King's daughter who was to be his wife. The son was in such trouble that he did not think what he was doing, and said, "Yes, dear father, your will shall be done," and thereupon the King shut his eyes, and died." (The Twelve Huntsmen)

Another downside of being a prince is they're sometimes transformed into animals. Princes are turned into fish, lions, and a black dog.[iv] In one case, a prince is turned into a stove.[v] Luckily, they're almost always restored to their human form—usually by a princess.

Princes express the most happiness of all characters—mostly because they live happily ever after through marriage and often become king. Over half of their expressions are happy, about one-quarter are sad. They express little fear and anger. Thus, although they're the most active and adventurous characters, they're not particularly fearful or angry. Mostly they're happy, and occasionally sad. Thus, it's good to be a prince because you're a desired marital partner. The lovely maiden you rescue will likely become your wife unless your parents interfere.

Princesses

Princesses are fairly inactive and show more fear than any other royal character. It's probably because they tend to be in terrible situations—they're often captured and locked away, desperate to be rescued. One princess was captured by a dragon for its breakfast meal.

> *And when the huntsman had taken care of his animals, he asked the innkeeper why the town was thus hung with black crape? Said the host, "Because our King's only daughter is to die tomorrow." The huntsman inquired if she was "sick unto death?" "No," answered the host, "she is vigorous and healthy, nevertheless she must die!" "How is that?" asked the huntsman. "There is a high hill without the town, whereon dwells a dragon who every year must have a pure virgin, or he lays the whole country waste, and now all the maidens have already been given to him, and there is no longer anyone left but the King's daughter, yet there is no mercy for her; she must be given up to him, and that is to be done tomorrow." (The Two Brothers)*

Luckily, the huntsman saves her, marries her, and becomes king.

Princesses are often punished and taught a lesson when they're too haughty or have made promises they don't keep. The lesson almost always comes from a father or other man. One young princess loses her golden ball in a water and a frog rescues it in exchange for the promise he will be her playmate and eat and sleep with her. She agrees to this deal, but then promptly leaves the frog once he returns her golden ball. The frog is undeterred and presents himself at the castle. The princess explains her dilemma, and the king promptly insists she stand by her word.

> *"That which thou hast promised must thou perform. Go and let him in." She went and opened the door, and the frog hopped in and followed her, step by*

> *step to her chair. There he sat and cried, "Lift me up beside thee." She delayed, until at last the King commanded her to do it...The King's daughter began to cry because she was afraid of the cold frog...But the King grew angry and said, "He who helped thee when thou wert in trouble ought not afterwards to be despised by thee." (The Frog-King or Iron Henry)*

The most striking version of a king teaching a princess a lesson occurs in the story, *King Thrushbeard*. A beautiful, haughty princess won't accept any suitor—none are good enough for her. She even makes fun of them. She says one suitor has a chin like a thrush's beak, and from that point on they call him "King Thrushbeard." Her father becomes so exasperated with her that he claims the next beggar who comes to the castle will be her husband. A fiddler visits the castle and the king fulfills his promise; she marries him and is resigned to a life of poverty. At several points, she wishes she had married the king with the crooked chin, but she's resigned to her fate. When she goes to her family's castle to see her brother's wedding, she sees King Thrushbeard, who reveals he is the fiddler she married, and he had disguised himself during their marriage. She promptly asks for his forgiveness (and we assume they live happily ever after).

Regular men also teach princesses lessons when they believe they're superior to others, particularly brave suitors who wish to marry them. In *The White Snake*, a servant competes for the hand of a beautiful princess by pulling a golden ring from the bottom of the sea (with the help of some fish friends). Although he does the impossible, the princess is unmoved and insists he pick up every seed that has fallen to the ground from ten millet sacks. And when he accomplishes that mission, she requests he get the apple from the tree of life. When he does so, she falls in love with him.

Princesses are often happy, sad, and fearful. Almost half of their emotions are happy due to living happily ever after, one-quarter of their emotions are sad, and another one-quarter are fearful. Given the scary situations they're in and the lessons they endure, the sadness and fearful expressions are to be expected. The least expressed emotion is anger, which is surprising given that they're often put in awful situations. So, if

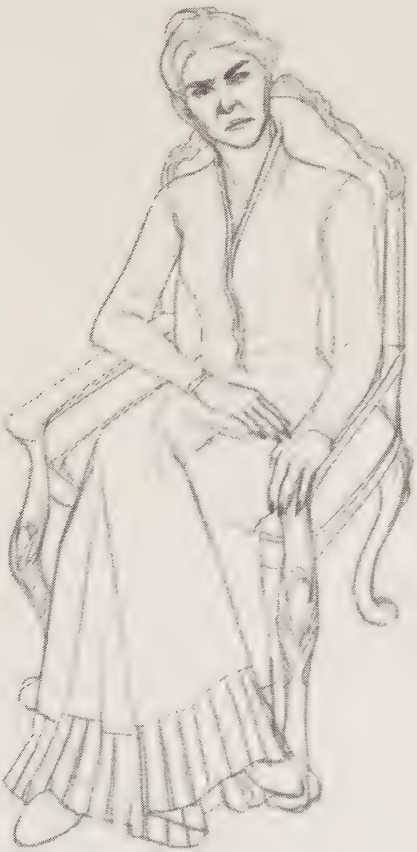
you're a princess, don't be too haughty. And if you're in trouble, hold on because your man is likely on his way.

Stepmothers

Stepmothers are generally described as "wicked" and "old." Every stepmother in the Grimms' fairy tales is evil and does horrific things to her stepchildren. They verbally abuse them, deprive them of food, make them do impossible tasks, turn them into animals, and attempt to kill them or

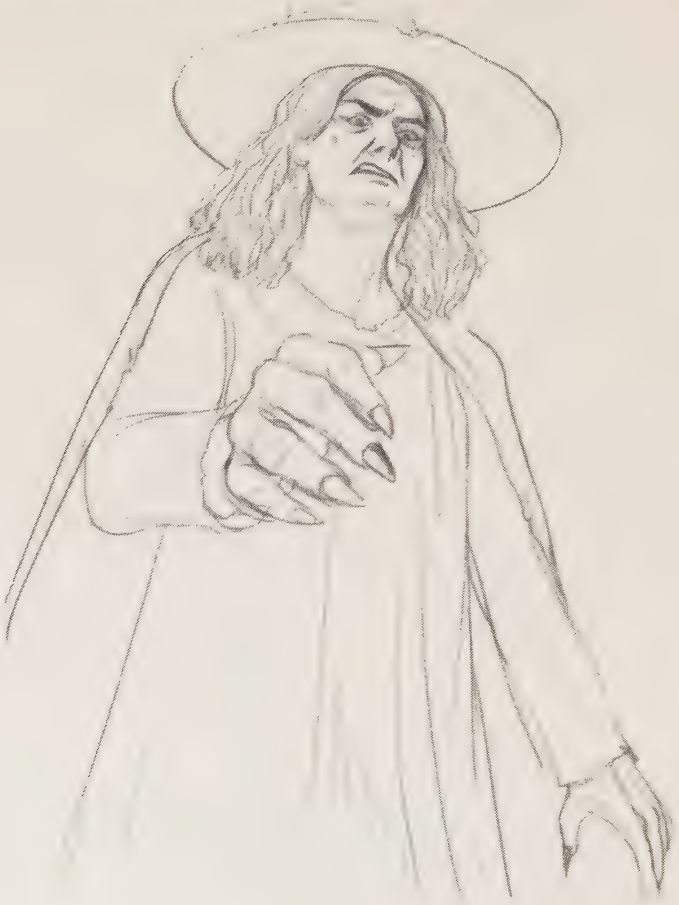
actually do so. Not one stepmother is ever described as being kind to her stepchildren.

Stepmothers are mostly angry (71% of expressions) and occasionally fearful or happy, but never sad. As described earlier, anger is an emotion associated with status and power, but it's also an indication of frustration with people and situations they're trying to control. And because that's largely what they express, they're clearly not getting their way. Evil characters like stepmothers are almost always vanquished. Apparently, if you're a stepmother, you're definitely evil, and you're going to try to hurt your stepchildren, but you'll eventually be frustrated and won't get your way.



Witches

Witches are described as "wicked," "ugly," and "old." They can also be stepmothers, which is the worst combination. Witches are among the most powerful characters because they cause a lot of suffering for people. However, they're almost always punished for their transgressions. The most common emotion witches express is anger. Over half of their expressions are angry, followed by fear. They rarely express happiness or sadness. They're powerful characters who don't get to have a lot of fun. The message for witches is that you will have a huge influence, but you will be frustrated, fearful and will eventually get defeated.



Old and Young Non-Royal Women

Non-royal women fall into two types: an older, powerful woman who helps other characters and a younger woman who is not powerful. Older, powerful women sometimes give less powerful characters useful information. In the story *The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces*, a king wants to know where his twelve daughters go at night because their shoes are always worn out in the morning. Several princes try to solve the mystery and fail. A soldier decides to try, and he encounters an old woman who tells him not to drink the wine he's served at night by the princesses. She also gives him an invisible cloak. He solves the mystery and ends up marrying one of the princesses as a result.

These old, powerful women also provide access to important people like the devil or giants. In *The Devil and his Grandmother*, three soldiers strike a deal with the devil to serve him for seven years in exchange for all the gold they want. But after seven years, if they cannot guess a riddle he poses, they belong to the devil. An aged woman suggests the solders visit the devil's grandmother who finds out the answer to the riddle. As a result of her intervention, they are freed from their terrible agreement. In general, these old, powerful women don't express any emotions at all; they just help people.

The other type of woman is a younger woman who isn't powerful at all. The single, beautiful women are often passive, tend to suffer, and are rewarded like Cinderella. The married ones are usually helpmates to their husbands and can sometimes be stupid or problematic. These powerless non-royal women express sadness, happiness, fear, and anger about equally. The message is clear for powerless female characters: If you're unmarried, beautiful, and good, you may marry a prince or a king, and you will experience many emotions along the way.

Non-Royal Men

Non-royal men tend to be tailors, huntsmen, soldiers, millers, and servants. These male characters are typically unmarried and can be smart, fearless, or foolish, but they sometimes accomplish impossible tasks, overcome evil people, and end up marrying princesses or gaining major

positions within a kingdom as a result of their actions. Non-royal men express all types of emotions, especially happiness and fear. As you may recall, fear was not expressed much by princes or kings, so it's interesting to see the regular man experiences it, whereas the royal man does not. The message here is that a non-royal man can gain a princess and a great position, but it will be an emotional ride.

Other Male Characters

Other male characters include the devil, death, the Lord, St. Peter, dwarfs, and wizards. These characters are relatively rare. The devil is obviously evil, and he strikes deals with humans, but he can be outsmarted. His predominant emotion is anger. Wizards are often evil but can be defeated. Death can't be reasoned with or defeated, and it doesn't express any emotions. The Lord and St. Peter make things right when situations are out of control, and they don't express any emotions. Dwarfs can be evil or good (e.g., *Snow White*). Evil dwarfs express anger and can be defeated. The message is evil male characters can be outsmarted, even the devil, but powerful male characters cannot.

For an overview of the common male and female characters as well as their power, emotions, and outcomes, see Table 16: **Overview of Male Characters** and Table 17: **Overview of Female Characters**.

Major Message: Kings and princes are mostly happy whereas queens are mostly sad. Princes are usually happy whereas princesses are generally sad, fearful, and happy (due to living happily ever after). Witches and stepmothers are mostly angry. Old women generally don't express any emotions, and non-royal women feel all emotions equally. Non-royal men are usually happy and fearful, whereas the devil and wizards are mostly angry.

9 | Other Messages in Fairy Tales

Follow Instructions or Else!

One of the messages in many fairy tales is that following the rules is paramount. It doesn't matter how crazy the instruction is, you must follow it or you're going to have some major problems. This lesson is aptly conveyed in *Little Red Riding Hood*, or *Little Red Cap*, as it's called in the Grimms' stories. Little Red Riding Hood's mother warns her to stay on the path and not to tarry on the way to her grandmother's house. As a result of not following this advice, she and her grandmother are eaten by the wolf. Luckily, a huntsman saves both of them when he cuts the wolf open and sets them free. Apparently, the wolf ate them whole.

Not following instructions can result in death, as it did for one little girl who was warned not to go see an old woman by the name of Frau Trude. Her parents insist the old woman is a witch and if she goes to visit, they will disown her. Undeterred, she visits the witch, who turns the little girl into a block of wood and throws her into the fire.[1]

Other instructions are less clear and almost bizarre, but characters who follow them are rewarded. In *Faithful John*, a loyal servant to the king dies and becomes a stone who can talk. He explains to the king if he kills his two children and sprinkles their blood on him, he will live again. The king convinces his wife that they must do this terrible deed, which restores the servant to life. Luckily, the children are also restored.

Be Nice to Animals

In many fairy tales, being nice to animals has tremendous rewards and being unkind to them is severely punished. Kindness to animals is

sometimes rewarded by the animals themselves. In *The White Snake*, a servant frees three fishes who are caught in the reeds, he avoids trampling some ants by taking his horse around them, and he feeds some fledgling ravens. Each creature says the same thing to him, "We will remember you—one good turn deserves another!" When he needs to find a golden ring at the bottom of the ocean, the fish get it for him. When he is asked to sort seeds, the ants do this task, and when he needs to find the apple from the tree of life, the ravens obtain it for him. His ability to procure these objects lands him the king's daughter.

In other cases, the animals instruct characters on how to obtain what they desire. For example, in the story *The Golden Bird*, a fox tells the youngest prince what he must do to eventually marry a golden princess. His first two brothers don't listen to the fox, and one remarks, "How can such a silly beast give wise advice?" The prince who takes this advice eventually obtains what he desires.

Attractive People are Never Old

Beauty and age are always intertwined in the world of fairy tales. Those who are beautiful are never referred to as being old. Old women and old men are never described as attractive, and the most physically attractive characters are generally unmarried, which is an indication of age. Ageism is alive and well in fairy tales.

Magic is a Part of Everyday Life & People Aren't as They Appear

In the world of fairy tales, becoming bewitched and being transformed into a stone, a statue, or an animal are everyday occurrences. And a person's appearance can be distorted to be ugly or old. In one story, a man goes to rescue a beautiful princess in a castle and is surprised by what he finds.

> *He entered and went through all the rooms, until in the last he found the King's daughter. But how shocked he was when he saw her. She had an*

ashen-gray face full of wrinkles, blear eyes, and red hair. "Are you the King's daughter, whose beauty the whole world praises?" cried he. "Ah," she answered, "this is not my form; human eyes can only see me in this state of ugliness, but that thou mayst know what I am like, look in the mirror it does not let itself be misled and will show thee my image as it is in truth." She gave him the mirror in his hand, and he saw therein the likeness of the most beautiful maiden on earth, and saw, too how the tears were rolling down her cheeks with grief. (The Crystal Ball)

Magic is so common in fairy tales it's described as something to be expected. In one story, *Jorinda & Joringel*, a couple walks too close to a witch's castle and the woman is transformed into a nightingale when the man looks away from her. The witch also works her magic on him and he's unable to move or speak until the witch leaves. All of this is described as if it's completely normal and expected.

Expect Miracles

Because magic is so commonplace, one can always expect miracles in fairy tales. Dead people are brought back to life, those who have been incapacitated are restored, and blind people regain their eyesight. In one story, a tailor is blinded by another man and finds himself underneath gallows where the two dead men are hanging. Surprisingly, the men talk to one another even though they're dead.

Then one of the men who had been hanged began to speak, and said "Brother, art thou awake?" "Yes, I am awake," answered the second. "Then I will tell thee something," said the first; "the dew which this night has fallen down over us from the gallows, gives every one who washes himself with it his eyes again. If blind people did but know this, how many would regain their sight who do not believe that to be possible?

When the tailor heard that, he took his pocket-handkerchief, pressed it on the grass, and when it was moist with dew, washed the socket of his eyes with it. Immediately was fulfilled what the man on the gallows had said, and a couple of healthy new eyes filled the sockets. (The Two Travelers)

Characters Like the Devil and the Lord Walk among Us

Another noteworthy aspect of fairy tales is how characters like the Devil and the Lord live and interact with human beings. The devil and death each make agreements with various male characters in a few fairy tales. Often the agreements involve a level of service for a certain number of years or doing specific things, such as not bathing for a set amount of time.

A disbanded soldier had nothing to live on, and did not know how to get on. So he went out into the forest and when he had walked for a short time, he met a little man who was, however, the Devil. The little man said to him, "What ails you, you seem so very sorrowful?" Then the soldier said, "I am hungry, but have no money." The Devil said, "If you will hire yourself to me, and be my serving-man, you shall have enough for all your life? You shall serve me for seven years, and after that you shall again be free. But one thing I must tell you, and that is, you must not wash, comb or trim yourself, or cut your hair or nails, or wipe the water from your eyes." (The Devil's Sooty Brother)

However, the devil can be fooled. In *The Peasant and the Devil*, a man dupes the devil and obtains a large treasure by agreeing to give the devil the things that grow above the soil. But that season, he grows turnips. The devil then wants the things that grow beneath the soil the following season, and the peasant then grows wheat.[ii]

The Lord, in contrast, doesn't create agreements, but occasionally appears as a character who needs assistance. In one story, the narrator explains there was a time when God resided on earth, and he has very human needs.

> *In olden times, when the Lord himself still used to walk about on this earth among men, it once happened that he was tired and overtaken by the darkness before he could reach an inn. (The Poor man and the Rich Man)*

The Lord ends up rewarding those who treat him well.

Major Message: Fairy tales are a place where characters should always follow instructions, be nice to animals, realize that magic is a part of everyday life, and expect miracles. One may encounter the Lord or the devil in daily life, so look out. Old people are never attractive, and appearances can be very deceiving.

10 | Final Thoughts

At this point you may wonder why do these hidden messages matter? Why should we care if fairy tales are sexist, and women are passive and often saved? What does it matter if men are always the powerful, active characters? How does it matter if powerful men are good and powerful women are equally likely to be good as evil? It's just a story after all. Don't people know that?

Fairy tales are more than entertaining stories; they're a huge part of our culture. The commercial success of these stories shows how important they are in our society. By telling and retelling these narratives, we convey more than the plot lines—we also convey the hidden messages. The little girl who hears the tale of *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty* learns women are victimized, passive, and that attractive women are lucky to be saved by a handsome prince. And because these messages are largely hidden, they are generally not discussed. If anything, they are widely accepted as aspirational.

Anita Baker's song *Fairy Tales* speaks to the reality of how women grow up with expectations based on fairy tales and how they're deeply disappointed later in life. She sings about how she remembered her mother telling her fairy tales before she went to bed and imagined her future prince arriving, saving her, and making her happy. Instead, she experiences a relationship filled with screaming, crying, betrayal, and eventually abandonment. Her song claims that her mother's bedtime stories led her to expect a life that was unrealistic.

Researchers have investigated the impact of princess culture on children as young as preschoolers and have found staggering results. In a study of

198 preschoolers, researchers found that almost all girls and most boys had been exposed to Disney Princess media, with half of girls and almost one-third of boys viewing such media at least once a month, and two-thirds of girls playing with Disney Princess toys at least once a week.[i] Girls who engaged the most with Disney Princess media strongly identified with princess culture and tended to have more stereotypical ideas about gender. They also behaved in more gender-stereotypical ways (as observed by teachers and parents). This effect was observed one year later, which suggests that princess culture has a long-lasting impact.[ii] The concern is that girls who strongly identify with this culture will be more passive, less likely to think of themselves as being good at math and science, and more concerned with their appearance to the detriment of other aspects of self. In one study, adult women who saw themselves as "princesses" were more likely to give up on a challenging task, less likely to want to work, and more focused on superficial things.[iii]

One concern with princess culture is the tremendous focus on appearance, which psychologists are concerned is detrimental to girls. The American Psychological Association has discovered that a significant focus on appearance leads girls to be more prone to depression, eating disorders, and low self-esteem.[iv] Self-objectification, which is the degree to which one looks at oneself as an object, (whom others view only in terms of appearance), is linked to impaired performance on mathematical tasks and logical reasoning.[v]

More Recent Disney Princesses

It appears that Disney is trying to create some more up-to-date fairy tales where women are more active and less likely to be saved by a prince. Certainly, the movie *Frozen* is a step in the right direction with a focus on sisterly love and reuniting family members, not finding a handsome prince. One of the main characters, Anna, learns how handsome princes can be nefarious and one should closely inspect suitors for ulterior motives. In her case, the handsome prince is only looking for a seat on the throne and doesn't care for her at all. She ends up being more interested in an ice salesman with a good heart, but there is no mention of love or marriage

between them. The happily ever after occurs when she and her sister forgive one another and are reunited.

The movie *Brave* is also a good example of a more progressive movie where the focus is on the relationship between the young woman and her mother, rather than on winning the hand of a royal man. Her parents wish to arrange a marriage with one of the clansmen (or princes) in her area and she resists. She ends up visiting a witch and accidentally turns her mother into a bear. The rest of the movie is about how she and her mother repair their relationship and realize the importance of their bond. The movie doesn't end with a happily ever after related to marriage, but rather to the mother-daughter reunification.

Maleficent is another Disney movie that's a version of *Sleeping Beauty*, with a twist. In this movie, the witch has a love affair with Stefan, a man who eventually becomes king. Stefan cuts off the witch's wings and eventually marries someone else. When he and his wife have a little girl, Aurora, they invite the kingdom to celebrate her christening. The rest of the story is like *Sleeping Beauty*, with Maleficent showing up uninvited for the ceremony and casting a spell that Aurora will fall into a lengthy sleep on her sixteenth birthday. All goes as planned, except Maleficent becomes fond of the young girl and eventually is the one who awakens her with a kiss. It's not a handsome prince who loves her, but a woman who comes to view her like a daughter. The idea that women love and save one another is not typical of a fairy tale.

These movies are popular and profitable. *Frozen* had revenue of $400 million, *Brave* grossed $237 million, and *Maleficent* grossed $241 million in the United States.[vi] Although these revenue numbers are less than *Beauty and the Beast*, (which grossed around $500 million), they're more than the revenue for *Cinderella*, which grossed around $200 million.[vii] Clearly, these non-traditional fairy tales are very appealing. Researchers claim there is some evidence that Disney princes and princesses are becoming somewhat less traditional and more complex in their characters.[viii]

These new ways of thinking about 'happily ever after' suggest it's not about marriage or finding the prince (or princess). It's about the bonds we form across many different relationships and the way we behave in these

relationships. These new stories may lead us to think differently about the world and what we want within it.

Why Cinderella Didn't Live Happily Ever After

I'm afraid that things are unlikely to go well for Cinderella given the hidden messages that were uncovered in our analysis. Because she will be a queen, she'll have little power and be under attack by various women who wish to take her place. If she has a mother-in-law, that woman may be especially dangerous because she may want her son to be with a different, potentially royal woman. Given how most queens fare in the stories, she'll most likely be sad and fearful. Her power will be limited because her husband, the king, will be the one who will determine her fate. And if she does gain any power, people will worry she's evil, as many powerful women are believed to be. Lastly, because she's already shown she's passive, she will be greatly at risk to be abused if she does not stand up for herself.

We would like to believe Cinderella lived happily ever after, but it's unclear whether she understands what she's getting herself into at this point. The desire to be saved and to marry a handsome prince may be her downfall. So, we wish her luck. And if you're a person who desires to live a fairy tale life, be warned; it looks like there is a large part of the story that isn't communicated.

11 | Methodology and Data from Grimms' Fairy Tales

We employed a content analysis for this work, which is a common method of analyzing literary texts. Every fairy tale with humans as the major characters was read at least twice before coding them. The author was the primary person who coded the 169 stories, and another individual coded 129 of the stories in order to ascertain whether there were any biases on the part of either person. The two people used specific definitions for coding and each story was analyzed individually, without consulting the other coder. The correlation between the coders was .93, which means that the ratings were the same for 93% of all codes. For the specific codes, there was 88% coding agreement for active vs. inactive characters, 96% agreement for coding of evil and power, 100% for marrying up, 97% for suffering and 84% across all of the emotions that were coded.

Below are the definitions that were used.

Definitions

Marrying up: A non-royal person marrying or becoming engaged to a prince, princess, king or queen.

Agentic/Active characters: Characters who express an interest in a particular goal and then take specific actions toward achieving their objective, even when there are obstacles that impede their progress.

Most agentic/active character: The character who engages in the most actions designed to achieve desired goals.

Power: Having a positive or negative impact on another character through specific actions that are intended to influence them.

Most powerful character: The character who has the greatest positive or negative impact on other characters.

Suffering: A negative physical or emotional experience that is not desired by the character.

Confinement: Being imprisoned or unable to leave a situation (e.g., being locked in a tower). This definition includes being married against one's will.

Bewitched: Having a spell cast upon a particular character that altered the person's appearance or changed the character into an animal, statue, etc.

Evil Characters: Characters who consistently act in ways designed to cause suffering or the destruction of one or more characters

Defeating Evil: Punishment of evil characters and/or the restoration of wronged characters to their rightful positions.

Emotion Coding

Emotions of characters were coded based on the description of the character having one of four emotional experiences: happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. These emotions provided us with the most information about the inner life of the characters and the quality of their lives in the story.

Happiness: Character was described as being happy or as having a major event that was positive in nature, such as being reunited with a loved one, being released from a spell, or being saved from an emotionally/physically difficult situation. Characters who were described as "living happily ever after" were also coded as being happy.

Sadness: Character was described as sad or displayed tears.

Anger: Character was described as angry, yelled at another character, or insulted another character.

Fear: Character was described as afraid or fearful.

Data

As Table 1 shows, males and females marry up at about the same rate. We calculated a chi-squared statistic, which determines whether the data is similar to what we would expect by chance. As you can see below, the data is not statistically different than what would be expected by chance—so there is not a statistical difference in terms of the number of male versus female characters who marry up.

Table 1: ***Marrying Up***

Gender of person marrying royalty	Number of characters	Percentage
Male	28	56%
Female	22	44%
Total	50	100%

Chi-squared equals 0.729, p=0.3961 (not statistically significant)

Table 2 shows males are likely to marry up completely because of their actions.

Table 2: Reasons for Male Characters Marrying Up

Reasons male characters marry princesses/queens	Number of characters	Percentage
Appearance	0	0%
Actions	28	100%
Total	28	100%

Chi-squared equals 28.00, p< .0001 (statistically significant)

Table 3 shows females are more likely to marry up because of their appearance.

Table 3: Reasons for Female Characters Marrying Up

Reasons female characters marry princes/kings	Number of characters	Percentage
Appearance	13	59%
Actions	9	41%
Total	22	100%

Chi-squared equals 0.727, p=0.393 (not statistically significant)

Table 4 shows that no male character married up based on his appearance. However, 13 female characters married royalty simply because they were attractive.

Table 4: Gender and Marrying Because of Appearance

Gender of character marrying up because of appearance	Number of characters	Percentage
Females	13	100%
Males	0	0%
Total	13	100%

Chi-squared equals 11.14, p=0.008 (statistically significant)

Table 5 shows male characters are more likely to be active than female characters.

*Table 5: **Active, Agentic Characters***

Gender of active characters	Number of characters	Percentage
Male	124	74%
Female	43	26%
Total	167	100%

Chi-squared equals 38.32, p<.0001 (statistically significant)

Table 6 demonstrates male characters are much more likely to be powerful than female ones.

*Table 6: **Most Powerful Character in Each Story***

Gender of most powerful character	Number of characters	Percentage
Male	112	79%
Female	20	21%
Total	132	100%

Chi-squared equals 64.12, p<.0001 (statistically significant)

In Table 7, kings and princes are the royalty most likely to have power. Kings are over half of royal power characters.

*Table 7: **Royalty and Power***

Royalty characters with Power	Number of characters	Percentage
King	18	55%
Queen	1	3%
Prince	10	30%
Princess	4	12%
Total	33	100%

Chi-squared equals 17.62, p=.0005 (statistically significant)

Table 8 shows how men cause the most suffering and men suffer more than women. Men also cause the most suffering toward other men.

Table 8: ***Suffering***

Gender	Number of characters	Percentage
Males causing suffering of males	95	39%
Males causing suffering of females	52	22%
Females causing suffering of males	57	24%
Females causing suffering of females	37	15%
Total	241	100%
Chi-squared equals 28.94, p<.0001 (statistically significant)		
Overall males causing suffering	147	61%
Overall females causing suffering	94	39%
Chi-squared equals 11.22, p=.0008 (statistically significant)		
Overall men suffering	152	63%
Overall female suffering	89	37%
Chi-squared equals 15.95, p<.0001 (statistically significant)		

In Table 9, it's clear that female characters are confined against their will more often than males

Table 9: ***Gender of Character Confined in Story***

Gender Confined	Number of characters	Percentage
Female characters	39	65%
Male characters	21	35%
Chi-squared equals 5.4, p = .02 (statistically significant)		

In Table 10, although men are bewitched in stories slightly more than women, this result is not statistically significant.

Table 10: ***Gender of Bewitched Character***

Gender Bewitched	Number of characters	Percentage
Female characters	21	40%
Male characters	31	60%
Chi-squared equals 1.9, p = .165 (not statistically significant)		

In Table 11, it is clear male characters vanquish evil the most. Royal characters vanquish evil about one-third of the time.

Table 11: ***Vanquishing Evil***

Gender	Number of characters	Percentage
Men vanquishing evil	87	81%
Women vanquishing evil	20	19%
Chi-squared equals 40.71, p<.0001 (statistically significant)		
Royal person vanquishes evil	33	31%

In Table 12, its clear good powerful men are more common than any other type of character.

*Table 12: **Goodness, Evil and Gender***

Gender	Number of characters	Percentage
Good, powerful men	141	49%
Evil, powerful men	58	20%
Good, powerful women	42	14%
Evil, powerful women	49	17%
Total	290	100%

Chi-squared equals 86.57, p<.0001 (statistically significant)

In Table 13, good powerful men are more common than evil, powerful men.

*Table 13: **Male Characters, Goodness and Power***

Gender	Number of characters	Percentage of Male Characters
Good, powerful men	141	71%
Evil, powerful men	58	29%

Chi-squared equals 33.79, p<.0001 (not statistically significant)

In contrast, in Table 14, there is almost an equivalent number of good and evil powerful women.

*Table 14: **Female Characters, Goodness and Power***

Gender	Number of characters	Percentage of Female Characters
Good powerful women	42	46%
Evil, powerful women	49	54%

Chi-squared equals .40, p=.70 (not statistically significant)

Table 15 shows the most common emotions characters experience. The number in bold is the emotion experienced the most by each character. As shown below, happiness is experienced the most by kings, princes, princesses, and non-royal men and women. Queens experience sadness the most, and stepmothers and witches experience anger more than any other emotions.

*Table 15: **Characters and Emotions***

Character	Anger	Sadness	Fear	Happiness	Total
King	28% (19)	24% (17)	7% (5)	**41%** (28)	100% (69)
Queen	10% (3)	**41%** (12)	14% (4)	34% (10)	100% (29)
Prince	8% (3)	28% (10)	8% (3)	**56%** (20)	100% (36)
Princess	7% (5)	26% (18)	22% (15)	**44%** (30)	100% (68)
Stepmother	**71%** (10)	0% (0)	14% (2)	14% (2)	100% (14)
Witch	**59 %** (10)	7% (1)	29% (4)	14% (2)	100% (17)
Non-royal men	21% (38)	19% (34)	26% (47)	**33%** (59)	100% (178)
Other non-royal women	18% (20)	31% (35)	25% (28)	**26%** (29)	100% (112)

King Chi-squared equals 14.26, p=.002 (statistically significant)
Queen Chi-squared equals 7.64, p=.05 (almost statistically significant)
Prince Chi-squared equals 21.65, p<.0001 (statistically significant)
Princess Chi-squared equals 18.7, p=.0003 (statistically significant)
Stepmother Chi-squared equals 21.66, p<.0001 (statistically significant)
Witch Chi-squared equals 8.25, p=.04 (statistically significant)
Non-royal men Chi-squared equals 8.06, p=.04 (statistically significant)
Non-royal women Chi-squared equals 4.07, p=.25 (not statistically significant)

*Table 16: **Overview of Male Characters***

Character	Degree of Power	Good or Evil	Emotional Expressions	Outcomes
King	Powerful	Good	Mostly happiness	Maintains power and distributes punishment
Prince	Powerful	Good	Mostly happiness	Usually marries beautiful maiden or princess
Non-royal man	Some power, usually the result of intelligence or bravery	Mostly good	Happiness followed by fear	Obtains princess or position as a result of actions; evil characters always punished
Devil	Powerful	Evil	Anger	Devil can be outsmarted
Wizard	Powerful	Generally evil	Anger	Usually brutally punished for being evil

Summary: Most male characters are powerful. And most powerful, good male characters are happy.

Table 17: ***Overview of Female Characters***

Character	Degree of Power	Good or Evil	Emotional Expressions	Outcomes
Stepmother	Powerful	Evil	Mostly anger	Usually brutally punished
Witch	Powerful	Evil	Mostly anger	Usually brutally punished
Queen	Somewhat powerful	Good	Mostly sadness and some happiness	Often under attack and usually saved in the end
Old woman	Somewhat powerful	Good	None	Helpful to other people
Princess	Generally, not powerful	Good	Happiness, sadness, and fear	Usually saved by a prince, but sometimes taught lesson
Non-royal women	Not powerful	Good	Sadness, fear, and happiness	If unmarried, beautiful and good, may marry royalty

Summary: Most powerful female characters tend to be evil and are punished.

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Index

anger, 8, 16, 25, 53, 57, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 79, 86, 88, 90
Anger, 55, 80, 86, 87, 92, 94
Argiroff-Flood, Helen, 4, 6
Baker, Anita, 74
Beall Research, 4, 32, 89
Bearskin, 19
beast, 19, 21, 22, 24, 36, 70, 90
Beauty, 7, 8, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, 36, 40, 70, 76, 90, 91, 92
Beauty and the Beast, 7, 8, 15, 20, 21, 36, 40, 76, 90, 91, 92
Brave, 75, 76, 91
Briar Rose, 30, 32, 59
Cinderella, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 28, 30, 40, 59, 67, 74, 76, 77, 91, 92, 93
Clinton, Hillary, 48
Disney, 20, 74, 75, 76, 91
Ella Enchanted, 7
engagement, 25, 59
fairy godmother, 9
Faithful John, 42, 69
fear, 46, 53, 57, 62, 67, 79, 87, 88
Fear, 80, 86
Fitcher's Bird, 33, 52
Frozen, 75, 76, 92
giants, 6, 15, 32, 67
Hansel and Gretel, 8, 15, 32, 34, 36, 37, 40, 51
happiness, 9, 20, 25, 40, 53, 57, 60, 66, 67, 79, 86, 87, 88
Happiness, 79, 86, 87, 88
Hearst, Patty, 24
Hensley, Kristen, 4
Hut in the Forest, 27
Iron Stove, 43
Jack and the Beanstalk, 7, 8, 15, 40
Jorinda and Joringel, 51
king, 5, 6, 15, 17, 19, 27, 28, 30, 33, 37, 39, 46, 47, 48, 49, 53, 54, 55, 59, 60, 62, 63, 67, 69, 70, 76, 77, 78
King, 9, 17, 18, 19, 26, 28, 33, 39, 47, 49, 52, 54, 57, 59, 62, 63, 70, 82, 86, 87
kingdom, 10, 11, 19, 20, 25, 31, 33, 67, 76
kings, 11, 38, 44, 52, 54, 55, 57, 59, 68, 81, 82, 86
Lee, Jin A., 4
Little Brother & Little Sister, 49
Little Brother and Little Sister, 17, 18, 41, 51
Little Red Riding Hood, 8, 15, 40, 69
Little Snow-White, 45
magic, 9, 10, 25, 27, 30, 31, 37, 71
Maid Maleen, 39
Maleficent, 76, 93
Markle, Meghan, 13

marriage, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 39, 48, 57, 59, 60, 63, 75, 76
Marriage, 15, 27, 28, 93
Meghan Markle, 91
Non-royal men, 67, 86
non-royal women, 67, 86
old women, 48
Our Lady's Child, 17
Perrault, Charles, 9
Poehler, Amy, 48
Pretty Woman, 7
Pride and Prejudice, 7
prince, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 21, 24, 25, 27, 30, 31, 39, 46, 47, 49, 53, 59, 60, 67, 70, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 88
Prince, 10, 13, 82, 86, 87
Prince Charles, 10
princes, 6, 30, 32, 38, 44, 52, 67, 68, 75, 76, 81, 82, 86
Princes, 59, 60
princess, 5, 12, 13, 15, 30, 47, 53, 59, 60, 62, 63, 67, 68, 70, 75, 76, 78, 87, 91
Princess, 75, 82, 86, 88, 94
Princess Diana, 10, 94
princesses, 15, 38, 59, 63, 67, 76, 81, 86
Puss in Boots, 8
queen, 5, 6, 11, 27, 30, 31, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 53, 54, 56, 57, 76, 78
Queen, 31, 34, 45, 46, 52, 57, 82, 86, 88
Queens, 38, 56, 57, 86
Rapunzel, 8, 15, 40
sadness, 53, 55, 57, 63, 66, 67, 79, 86, 88, 94
Sadness, 80, 86, 88
Sleeping Beauty, 8, 15, 30, 31, 35, 40, 59, 74, 76
Snow White, 8, 15, 30, 31, 35, 40, 45, 46, 59, 68, 74
stepdaughter, 31
stepmother, 7, 9, 28, 31, 32, 39, 40, 45, 47, 49, 54, 55, 64, 65
Stepmother, 86, 88
Stockholm Syndrome, 24, 93
The Crystal Ball, 71
The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs, 48
The Devil's Sooty Brother, 72
The Donkey, 20
The Drummer, 26
The Frog-King or Iron Henry, 63
The Glass Coffin, 33
The Peasant's Wise Daughter, 39
The Poor man and the Rich Man, 73
The Seven Ravens, 43
The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces, 67
The Six Swans, 43, 52, 57
The Three Little Birds, 34
The Three Little Men in the Wood, 28, 54, 55
The Three Snake Leaves, 28
The Twelve Brothers, 57
The Twelve Huntsmen, 33, 60
The Two Brothers, 62
The Two Travelers, 72
The White Bride and the Black One, 47
The White Snake, 63, 70
wedding, 5, 9, 13, 20, 25, 28, 31, 46, 48, 54, 63, 91
witch, 21, 32, 36, 37, 40, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 69, 71, 76
Witch, 86, 88
witchcraft, 46, 48
witches, 6, 32, 37, 40, 46, 48, 51, 52, 66, 86

Witches, 49, 51, 66
wizard, 33, 52
wizards, 68

Endnotes

Chapter 1

[i] ("Cinderella 2015 total gross," n.d., "Beauty and the Beast 2017 total gross," n.d.).

[ii] ("Fairy tale origins," 2016)

[iii] (Mark, 2017)

[iv] (Heiner, 2012)

[v] (Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[vi] (Crain, D'Alessio, McIntyre & Smoke, 1983)

[vii] (Kohler, 2014)

[viii] (Zeitlin, n.d.)

Chapter 2

[i] (Buss, 1989)

[ii] (Milkman, 2018)

[iii] (Perrault, 2009)

[iv] (Taylor, 2017)

[v] (Hewlett, 2002)

[vi] (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Safilios-Rothschild, 1976)

[vii] (Waller & Hill, 1951)

[viii] (Bonner, 2018).

Chapter 3

[i] ("Beauty and the Beast 2017 total gross," n.d., "Beauty and the Beast 1991 total gross," n.d.).

[ii] (Deutsch, 2017)

[iii] (Barbot de Villeneuve, 2017)

[iv] (Barbot de Villeneuve, 2017)

[v] (Jameson, 2010)

Chapter 4

[i] (Wise Folks, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[ii] Lean Lisa, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[iii] it (Sharing Joy and Sorrow, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[iv] (Frederick & Catherine, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[v] (Clever Elsie, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[vi] (Lazy Harry, Grimm & Grimm, 2014).

[vii] (The Three Snake Leaves, The Little Peasant, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

Chapter 6

[i] (The Donkey, Grimm & Grimm, 2014, The Wishing Table, the Gold-Ass, and the Cudgel in the Sack, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

Chapter 7

[i] (The Clinton's Halloween Party—SNL, 2013)

[ii] (The Devil with Three Golden Hairs, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[iii] (Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

Chapter 8

[i] (Ekman, 2007)

[ii] (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2016)

[iii] (Tiedens, 2001; Tiedens et al, 2000)

[iv] (The Fisherman and His Wife, The Singing, Springing Lark, The Three Little Birds, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[v] (The Iron Stove, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

Chapter 9

[i] (Frau Trude, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

[ii] (The Peasant and the Devil, Grimm & Grimm, 2014)

Chapter 10

[i] (Coyne et al, 2016

[ii] (Coyne et al, 2016)

[iii] (Dinella, cited in Coyne et al, 2016)

[iv] (APA, 2007)

[v] (APA, 2007)

[vi] ("Frozen 2013 total gross," n.d., "Brave 2012 total gross, n.d., "Maleficent 2014 total gross," n.d.)

[vii] ("Beauty & the Beast 2017 total gross," n.d., Beauty & the Beast, 1991 total gross," n.d., "Cinderella 2015 total gross," n.d.)

[viii] (Whitbourne, 2014)

Made in the USA
Monee, IL
24 March 2022

a4208b02-a0da-47a3-9770-34b05e297602R01

Anne E. Beall received her MS, MPhil, and PhD degrees in Social Psychology from Yale University. She is founder and CEO of Beall Research in Chicago. This book is her 6th one.

Did Cinderella live happily ever after? You might think so until you look more closely at the hidden messages in beloved fairy tales. In Cinderella Didn't Live Happily Ever After, fairy tales are analyzed in terms of the underlying messages about marriage, power, suffering, agency, and good versus evil, with a focus on how male and female characters differ in each of these areas. The analysis is data-driven, and it provides clear evidence for the hidden messages in these beloved tales. The end conclusion is not whether fairy tales are good or bad, but rather what messages they deliver about life, even if unintentionally.

ISBN 9798482613726

90000

9 798482 613726

W9-BSB-826